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EXPOSITIONS

BY THE
REV. SAMUEL COX, D.D. (ST. ANDREWS)

AUTHOR OF

"SALVATOR MUNDI," "A COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF JOB,"
"THE BIRD'S NEST," ETC., ETC., ETC.

VOLUME IV.

London
T. FISHER UNWIN
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MDCCCLXXXVIII



TO THE MEMORY
OF
THOMAS TOKE LYNCH,
TEACHER, POET, FRIEND:
TO WHOM I OWE MUCH,
AND NOT I ALONE,
BUT THE WHOLE CHURCH OF GOD.

PREFACE.

THIS, I think, must be the *biographical* volume of the Series. So many of my critics have expressed a preference for those discourses which deal with character, and especially with the obscure characters of Holy Writ, that, in deference to their judgment, I have included in the present Volume an unusual number of that kind. And so many clergymen have written to tell me that they use my sermons in their pulpits, and find that those which are complete in themselves best serve their turn, that I have excluded a long series which I had prepared, and have replaced it with discourses more suitable for their purpose. For there is no man, I suppose, who holds the truths we all teach with strong conviction, but would gladly preach them from a thousand pulpits, if he could. And as I myself must cease to preach shortly after this Volume appears, I am naturally the more willing to speak by other lips than my own.

This must also, I am afraid, be the *last* volume of the

Series. I never intended it to run to more than six or seven volumes ; but I frankly confessed in the preface to Volume I. that I could not "afford to publish books which do not sell," and as my publisher informs me that he is still "out of pocket" by the adventure, I must perforce discontinue the Series a little earlier than I had intended.

One of my kindest and most sympathetic reviewers commences his notice of Volume III. with the sentence : "To large numbers of the most intelligent students of Scripture it would be a sore disappointment if they did not receive at least one volume every year from the pen of this distinguished expositor." But I fear that the number of such students cannot be very large, or that they do not care for or cannot purchase one volume from my pen every year. And, perhaps, as those who do buy them, and are likely therefore to read this Preface, must have a friendly appreciation of my work, I may be permitted to take a more personal tone than would otherwise be becoming, and to add that I by no means intend to cease from that work. The impaired condition of my health compels me to give up preaching, but it in no way affects my power of writing. And since as long as I live, and retain my power, I must in some way serve the Master whose service has been a joy and an exceeding great reward to me for more than forty years, I hope that I may still be permitted to serve Him

with my pen, and that He will make the way, now a little obscure, plain before me.

If I may maintain this personal tone a moment longer, I should like, since life and opportunities are so uncertain, to say a word or two of grateful recognition to my unknown reviewers. No author, surely, was ever more generously handled. Certainly I can remember no Nonconformist author who has received such kindly and generous appreciation from the organs of the Established Church, or from writers in many leading papers and magazines which do not ordinarily notice Biblical and theological books. And as I have lived a quiet and retired life, far from London, am a member of no literary club or clique, and have never had it in my power to make any return for the service they have done me, I take their appreciation of my work, which has often outrun its deserts, as a disproof of the selfish and sordid motives often attributed to critics and reviewers. Lest I should not have another chance, and because I can no longer be suspected of the gratitude which consists mainly of a keen sense of favours to come, I take this opportunity of assuring them that their kindly appreciation and allowance have not fallen on an ungrateful soil. Their sympathy and goodwill have been a constant encouragement and support.

February, 1888.

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I.

SIMEON.

I.—THE SONG.

“Now lettest thou thy servant depart, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace ; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples ; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”—LUKE ii. 29–32.

THE song of Simeon, the *Nunc Dimittis*, has, in some form, been adopted into the worship of the Christian Church, through all its branches, for many centuries. But, familiar as we are with his tiny psalm, very few of us, I apprehend, have made any thoughtful and sustained attempt to conceive what the man himself was like, and what were the principles and convictions by which his life was shaped and fed. When we think of him, we form no clear well-defined image ; he has no distinguishing qualities and features by which we may identify him and separate him from his neighbours. A man of no mark or likelihood to his cotemporaries, save that he wore “the white flower of a blameless life,”

he is little more to us than he was to them. A venerable good old man, who once in his life was so transported out of and above himself as to sing a song which the world will never let die,—this, I suppose, is the best, the most definite, conception of him which most of us have formed.

Yet the man is worth knowing for his own sake, and not simply because he was brought into momentary contact with the Holy Child, and may, I think, be known, though it must be confessed that the epithets by which St. Luke describes him do not help us much. Indeed, by the very way in which he introduces him, the Evangelist seems to warn us that it may be difficult for us to identify and distinguish him. For he tacitly admits that Simeon was not a distinguished man. He was only *a certain* Simeon, a man in Jerusalem whose name happened to be Simeon, or Simon, one of the commonest names in Israel. And though a wild attempt has been made to identify this Simeon with Rabbi Simeon, the son of Hillel and the father of Gamaliel, it has naturally failed; for, although we know very little of either of these two men, we know just enough of their differences of age and religious position to be sure that the old man who took the child Jesus in his arms could not possibly have been the great rabbi of his day.

St. Luke does, indeed, tell us that his Simeon was “just and devout;” and we know that (to use the

words of Josephus, when speaking of a much more distinguished Simeon) "he was called *just* both for his piety toward God and his charity toward his fellows;" and that he was called *devout* to denote that he feared God, that his piety bore the stamp of humility in opposition to the self-complacent self-righteousness of the Pharisees.

Simeon, therefore, fulfilled the ideal of Hosea, which Professor Huxley pronounces "the perfect ideal" of religion: he did justly, he loved mercy, he walked humbly with his God. And to know so much of any man is, doubtless, to know a great deal of him, and even to know what is best worth knowing. But it does not mark him off from his fellows; it does not define and individualize him: for, happily, even in those formal and degenerate days, there were many men who were both just and devout. Joseph, Mary's husband, was "a just man;" Cornelius was a "devout man and one that feared God," and even had "a devout soldier" to wait upon him. And what we want is some individualizing touch by which we may distinguish Simeon from Joseph or Cornelius, or any other good man of his time.

We seem to be nearing our mark when we read that he was "waiting for the Consolation of Israel;" for these words imply not only that Simeon cherished that common hope of all good Israelites, the coming of the long-promised Messiah, but that he conceived of

Messiah's advent on its more spiritual side—as a *Consolation* for all the sorrow and shame inflicted on them for their sins, and as a redemption from their bondage to sin. Yet there were many pious men in Israel who yearned for Messiah's advent because they conceived of Him, not as a great King who would give them the victory over their foes, but, rather, as the strong and tender Paraclete who would comfort them for all their sorrows and save them from all their distresses—above all, from the sorrow and distress which sprang from an imperfect obedience, an imperfect conformity to the will of God. “May I see the Consolation of Israel” was, in fact, a common formula of aspiration among the religious Jews.

Even the fact that Simeon was a prophet, that he had received a Divine premonition of the Advent, and was moved by a Divine impulse to come into the Temple at the very moment when the Holy Child was presented before the Lord—the very moment when the pure Son of God was being purified, the Redeemer of men redeemed (Luke ii. 22–24), and the great High Priest ransomed from the service of the Hebrew Priesthood¹—even this notable fact does not differentiate him from many of his fellows, though it does from most of them; for there were many prophets in the Hebrew, and many more in the Christian, Church.

¹ See Discourse on *The Redemption of the Redeemer*, page 30.

Christian legend, however, supplies a somewhat individualizing, and not improbable,¹ touch ; for it affirms that Simeon had stumbled at the words of Isaiah (vii. 14), " Behold *a virgin* shall conceive ;" and that it was while he was harassed by the doubts which this prediction bred in his mind he received the promise that he should not die till he had seen it fulfilled : for there is always something characteristic in a man's doubts, provided of course that they are *his own*, and if they be honest and sincere.

But if a man's doubts are characteristic, how much more individualizing are his beliefs, the truths on which he really rests and by which he really lives ? " As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." It is his conceptions of truth, the principles and convictions by which he is animated, that differentiate him from his fellows, and set him before us in his *habits* as he lived. If we can only reach his ruling conceptions and beliefs, we learn far more about him than from any descriptive epithets applied to him.

Where, then, should we look to find the man Simeon

¹ Not improbable ; for from his own words it is obvious that the great *Immanuel* prophecy of Isaiah was much in his mind. At least three of his thoughts or phrases—a very large proportion—are taken from this prophecy. That of the Light to lighten the Gentiles from Isaiah ix. 2 ; that of the Stone, or Rock, set for the fall and rising of many, from Isaiah viii. 14, 15 : and that of the Signal for Contradiction from Isaiah vii. 14, the very Verse in which the prediction that a Virgin should conceive is found.

if not in the Song with which he greeted the Lord's Christ, and in which his habitual convictions, beliefs, hopes, rose to their highest and frankest expression? Not in Luke's description of him, but in his own unconscious, and therefore more significant, disclosure of himself, we may expect to discover what he was really like, and to gain a conception of him which will individualize him to us and make him a real and living man.

If, then, we look at his Song at all carefully, we shall find in it (1) a noble conception of Life; (2) a noble conception of Death; and (3) a noble conception of Salvation; while from all three we may infer the nobility of the heart which cherished them.

I. We have *a noble conception of Life*. We often take Simeon's words as if they were a prayer, and meant, "Now let, or permit, thy servant depart:" whereas they are really a thanksgiving; "Now *art* thou letting thy servant depart." Nor does even this rendering adequately convey his meaning. We come much nearer to it if we render: "*Now art thou relieving, or setting free, thy slave, O master* (literally, "O despot"), *according to thy word, in peace.*" In fact, Simeon regards himself as a sentinel whom, by his word, or promise—"Thou shalt not see death till thou hast seen the Lord's Christ"—the Great Master, or Captain, had ordered to an elevated and dangerous post, and charged to look for and announce

the advent of a great light of hope, a light which was to convey glad tidings of great joy. The opening scene of the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus discloses, as some of you will remember, a Watchman who for nine long years had been looking for the kindling of the beacon, the "blazing torch," the "bright sign," the "blest fire," which should announce the fall of Troy; and who, when at last he beholds the welcome signal, sings at once the victory of Greece and his own discharge; that he shall no longer be chained like a dog, by the duty of his post, is well-nigh as much to him as the general joy in which he shares. And, in like manner, Simeon no sooner beholds the Light rising on the distant horizon for which he has waited so long, than he at once proclaims its advent, with its glad message of triumph, and rejoices in his own release from his prolonged and weary task.

To him, therefore, life, or at least his own life, shaped itself as the task of a watchman, or *a sentinel on duty*—who has to face rough weather and smooth as he paces his weary beat, to confront the fears and hidden perils of the darkness, in order that the camp he guards may be secure; but who is sustained, under the burden of anxiety and weariness, by the hope of receiving a signal, of seeing a light arise in the darkness, which will not only release him from his post, but will also bring the tidings, or the prediction, of a great and final victory. And that is a very noble, though by no means a

perfect, conception of human life. It *is* imperfect ; for life is too large and complex to be fully rendered by any one image. But, nevertheless, it is a noble conception, such as any Stoic would have welcomed, such as any Christian may welcome if only he illumine the sentinel's duty with the sentinel's hope.

It is a conception, moreover, which may be very helpful to us in many of the conditions in which we are placed. When life grows as weary and monotonous to us, through the prolonged pressure of samely duties, as to the watchman fixed to Agamemnon's roof or to a dog chained to a post ; or when the zest of youth has passed and the infirmities and disabilities of age, or disease, accumulate upon us ; or when we are weighed down with a burden of cares, anxieties, and fears, many of which are gross and palpable enough, but to some of which we can hardly give a name ; when flesh, or heart, fail us, or both fail us, it surely would sustain and comfort us were we to remember that our post has been appointed us by the great Captain who makes no mistake ; that the duties and the burdens allotted to us have an end of discipline and love, and are intended to make us stronger, wiser, better ; and that, however long it may delay its coming, a great Light is to arise upon us ; that it is *this* for which we are watching and serving : and that it will bring with it glad tidings of great joy for all people as well as for us. Life grows very sacred and

beautiful when we feel that we are where we are, and are doing all we do, and bearing all we have to bear, by God's will—"according to thy word;" and are moving, through darkness, on our stedfast round, to proclaim both that all is well, because all is going on under the great Taskmaster's eye, and that all will be better still so soon as we all learn to see in the Taskmaster our Saviour and our Friend.

Simcon was by no means the first poet to whom this conception of life commended itself. A greater than he, Job, had lit upon it centuries before, though to him it had only been a wish instead of a ruling belief. In one of his most hopeless moods he cries (Job xiv. 13-15): "If only, instead of this endless round of injustice and misery, God would appoint me a set time, and then remember me, all the days of that hard term would I wait, till my discharge came, standing to my post on earth with immovable and uncomplaining fidelity till I fell at it, and even standing at it again in Hades till that joyful day arrived, and the light shone down into my darkness." What Job longed for, we have. We know that a day *will* come on which God will call for us, and we shall answer Him. Nay, we know that the Light, which is the Life of men, *has* risen on our darkness, that it *is* shining, and that in due time it will illuminate the whole earth. Let us go on our rounds, then, all our appointed term, in faith, and patience, and hope;

assured that all is well with the world because God is in heaven, and because He is bringing heaven down to earth.

II. In Simeon's Song we have *a noble conception of Death*. He was not to die till he had seen the Lord's Christ. But now that he has seen the Christ, he is in haste to be gone; for, to him, death is the relief of the sentinel from an arduous and perilous post; it is the enfranchisement of a slave into freedom and peace: "Now art thou *setting free thy slave*, O master, *in peace*, according to thy word;" for, in his view, the sentinel was also a slave, and the discharge of the sentinel was also the manumission of the slave.

Relief from toil, relief from danger, relief from bondage—can any conception of death be more welcome and attractive to weary, worldworn, sinful men? Only one thing could render it more attractive and complete, and this we, who have the mind of Christ, are bound to supply: *viz.*, that our relief from toil will not be an exemption from work, but an added capacity for labour which will take all toil and weariness out of it; that our relief from danger will not release us from that strife against evil in which even the holy angels are engaged, but will bring us an immortal strength and serenity in virtue of which we shall carry on the conflict without fear, and cherish the sure and certain hope that evil must in the end be overcome of good: and that our

relief from bondage will not be a discharge from service, but will bring us a vigour and a grace which will make our service our delight, since henceforth we shall serve as sons and not as slaves.

An enfranchisement into freedom and into peace, this was Simeon's conception of death, and should be ours if, like him, we have seen the Lord's Christ. And if we thus conceive it; if we know and believe that Death will strike off the fetters of our imperfection, and give us a freedom, and an inward tranquility and harmony of nature, which will enable us to serve God and our fellows without weariness, and to take our part in the eternal strife with evil without any fear or doubt of its final issue, why should we dread to die? If Simeon could leave the world without regret, in part because he believed that all would go well with a world into which Christ had come, and in part because a still brighter prospect, the prospect of an immediate freedom and an immediate peace, awaited *him* in the world to which he went, we surely, if we share his convictions, may be content to follow him when our turn shall come, and greet the kindly angel of death with the words, "Lord, now art thou setting free thy servant, in peace, according to thy word."

III. We have a *noble conception of Salvation*. Simeon was content to go because his eyes had seen the salvation of God. And he conceived of this salvation as a

salvation prepared before "the face of *all peoples*," all races ; as a light which was to lift the veil of darkness, or ignorance, from the eyes of *the Gentiles*, as well as to shed a new glory on the humiliated and enslaved sons of Israel. And this conquest of darkness by light, this overcoming of evil with good, which was to be for all men and upon all, was surely a very large and noble conception of Salvation.

We commonly attribute a narrow and exclusive spirit to the Jews, and think of them as men who, because they were elected to convey a blessing to all the families of the earth, deemed themselves the favourites of Heaven, and despised all who were outside the pale of God's covenant with the seed of Abraham. And, no doubt, the ordinary Jew *was* of this haughty and intolerant temper ; but he was so in the teeth of all the highest teaching vouchsafed him. For with one consent the Psalmists and Prophets of Israel held Jehovah to be the Father of the spirits of all flesh, who looked with equal affection on all his children, and had elected one member of the great human family to special privilege only for the sake of the rest, only that through the chosen seed his truth and grace might be revealed and demonstrated to all :—as, indeed, we are beginning to discover now that, in our Revised Version of the Old Testament, "all peoples" or "all nations," has been substituted for the familiar but

ambiguous phrase "all people." *People* might mean, and was often taken to mean no more than the people of Israel ; but "peoples" must include all kindreds and tribes and tongues.

Simeon does but shew the true prophetic, *i.e.*, the true catholic, spirit when he conceives of the salvation of God as extending to the Gentile as well as the Jew, and delights in a Mercy as wide as the world. And we fall short of that spirit, we sin against the revelation of the Old Testament no less than that of the New, so often as we affect any special personal interest in the fatherly love and compassion of God, or even when we conceive of his salvation as confined to the Church. The Church has been elected, as the Jewish race was elected, solely for the sake of the world, solely that it may carry the news and the power of salvation to those who are outside its pale. If we have seen the Light, it is that we may bear witness to the Light ; that we may announce its rising, reflect its splendour, and believe that it will shine on till the darkness is past and every shadow has fled away. If we are sentinels, it is that we may guard and save the whole camp, and not simply our own company or our own regiment.

These, then, were the principles and convictions by which Simeon was animated ; and they throw no little light on his character ; they distinguish him from, they raise him above, most of his neighbours. If we are

now asked to describe or define him, we may say, he was a man who thought of life as a hard round of duty, cheered by a great hope; who thought of death as a discharge from that duty which would raise him from a slave into a son, and replace bondage and fear and toil with freedom and peace; who thought of the divine salvation as an inward illumination, a triumph of good over evil, co-extensive with the human race. And he was true to his principles and convictions. As he thought in his heart, so he was, so he did. For many weary years he walked his little round of Jewish commandments and ordinances blameless, always waiting however, and always on the watch, for the rising of that Sun whose rising was to be the signal for the entire army to awake and advance. And when the signal came, which meant life to the world but death to him, he did not shrink from death, but hastened toward it and greeted it with the joy of a sentinel relieved from his post, of a slave emancipated into a tranquil freedom. Before he saw death he saw the Lord's Christ, and he rejoiced in "that great birth of time," not simply because it brought deliverance to him, nor simply because it would console and glorify Israel, but also and mainly because it was the pledge of salvation for the whole world.

In fine, he was true to his whole creed. And I do not see how we can doubt that, if we were true to it, it would lend a certain nobility and distinction to our

characters and lives which as yet they sorely lack. And we are bound to be true to it ; for his creed is our creed. We too profess to regard life as a term of duty, during which we are under stringent discipline, and have to pay sharply and heavily for every dereliction from that duty, but are cheered and sustained by a great hope, for the fulfilment of which we wait with courage and with patience. Yet how often do we fail in our duty ! how faintly do we trust this large hope ! We too profess to believe that death will be a release, an enfranchisement into an ampler, freer, more tranquil life : and yet when death draws nigh, whether to us or to those whom we love, how often we shrink back from it in dread, or submit to it as to a miserable necessity for which nothing can console us ! We too profess to believe that Christ is the Saviour of all men, and to rejoice in the wide sweep of his redeeming influence : and yet which of us does not think far more of his own salvation, or of that of the community to which he is attached, and feel far more sure of it, than of the salvation of the world ?

Which of us is as true to our convictions as Simeon was to his ? It is because we are not so true that our life is so much less dutiful, and so much less hopeful, than it should be, and that death is often a terror to us, and that the salvation of Christ takes so little effect upon us. Let our prayer, then, be : " Lord, we believe, but help, O help, our unbelief. Make us true to our convictions, and faithful to our hopes."

II.

SIMEON.

II.—THE PREDICTION.

“Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising up of many in Israel ; and for a sign to be spoken against : yea, and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul ; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.”—LUKE ii. 34, 35.

WE have considered the Song of Simeon ; we are now to consider his Prediction. In his Song we found a noble conception of life, a noble conception of death, and a noble conception of the salvation of God. He thought of life as a term of hard and perilous duty, like that of a sentinel going his rounds, but as cheered by the hope of receiving a signal which would announce the hour of dawn and of victory. He thought of death as the relief of a sentinel from his post, as the manumission of a slave into freedom and peace ; as a release, therefore, from toil and danger and bondage. And he thought of the Divine salvation as an universal salvation, as extending to all men, as a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the consolation and glory of Israel.

There was, therefore, an element of prediction in his very Song, and a very valuable element, as we shall soon discover. If he saw what the Advent meant, he also foresaw "the end of the Lord," the final goal of good to which the mission of Christ was to round. And, in large measure, his prediction has already been fulfilled, though a still larger fulfilment awaits it. The Light *has* lightened the Gentiles ; we owe Christendom to it and the Christian civilization. It *has* proved the glory of Israel : for but for the advent of Christ, but for the work which He began and his disciples have carried on, Judaism might have sunk, at the fall of Jerusalem, into an obscure and narrow sect, and the Old Testament Scriptures might have been as little to the modern as they were to the ancient world. In short, we owe the Bible, and all that the Bible has brought us, to the coming of Christ into the world. If He had not come there could of course have been no New Testament. If He had not come, in all probability the Old Testament would have been no more to us than the sacred books of any other race ; perhaps not so much as the writings of the Classical philosophers and poets, or the legends of our own Norse, Celtic, and German forefathers.

Simeon foresaw and foretold, then, the large ultimate results of the advent of Christ ; but he also foresaw and foretold its nearer, its more immediate, results ; and

these results are the theme of what we call his Prediction to distinguish it from his Psalm. This Child, he says, who is to be the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of Israel, is also to be as a Rock over which many will fall and on which many will rise, a Signal for strife and gainsaying, a Sword piercing and dividing the very soul, even where the soul is purest, and a Touchstone revealing the inward thoughts of many hearts and shewing how evil they are. Nor, large as the contradiction looks between these two conceptions of the immediate and the ultimate results of Christ's influence on the world, is there any real contradiction between them. For if the Light is to shine into a dark world, or a dark heart, it must struggle with and disperse the darkness before it can shed order and fruitfulness and gladness into it. In such a world as this there can be no victory without conflict, no achievement without strenuous effort, no joy without pain, no perfection except through suffering.

And, indeed, had Simeon left us nothing but a prediction of light and glory as the consequence of Christ's coming, had he *not* foretold the doubts it would quicken, the pain it would involve, the evil and imperfection it would disclose, the opposition it would excite, we might well have distrusted him and have lost the hope with which his words inspire us. For as yet we see no universal light and glory, whether in the world around us

or in our own hearts. But we do see a darkness which struggles against the light ; we do see the opposition of gainsayers ; we are conscious of many doubts, misgivings, imperfections, of much which even in the best of us sets itself against the truth and grace of Christ. Had Simeon passed by all these, and spoken of nothing but a Light which would irradiate and glorify all the sons of men, our own experience would have rendered his prediction dubious or incredible to us. It is because he frankly recognizes these nearer and more immediate results of the action of Christ upon man and the world that we can cherish the hope that, through these near and present results, we may advance into an order and economy in which, as in God Himself, there shall be no darkness at all, and believe that, beyond this instant scene of strife and imperfection and sorrow, there lies a world of gladness and victory and peace.

Far from being unwelcome to us, then, this Prediction, at which we must now look a little more closely, should be very welcome to us, since it recognizes that darker sadder side of the Christian history with which we are only too familiar ; while yet it bids us hold fast the hope of large, happy, and splendid results yet to flow from the advent and mission of our Lord.

In his Prediction Simeon bases himself on the older prophets, and, in especial, takes many thoughts and images from the great Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah

(Chaps. vii.-ix.). His "light to lighten the Gentiles" was probably derived from Isaiah's prediction (Chap. ix. 2): "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." His comparison of the Holy Child to a Rock on which some would fall and be bruised, while others would plant their feet on it and rise, seems to have been taken from Isaiah's description of the Lord of hosts (Chap. viii. 14, 15): "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel; . . . and many shall stumble thereon, and fall, and be broken." And his comparison of Christ to a Sign for contradiction, a sign to be spoken against, might never have been made if Isaiah had not declared (Chap. vii. 14) that his little son, Immanuel, should be a sign which Israel would despise and reject. Like Isaiah, and because he had studied Isaiah, Simeon conceived of the true Immanuel, the Lord's Christ, as a suffering Messiah who would be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; as passing through conflict to victory, as rising by suffering to perfection. And hence he warned Mary that even her pure and loving heart would be pierced by many sorrows as she saw her son thwarted and rejected by the very men He came to save and bless, sorrows as keen and cruel as if the large barbaric "sword" used

by the Thracian mercenaries ¹ had been thrust into her bosom. Hence, too, he warned us, and all men, that contact with Christ would determine our character and fate, revealing the thoughts hidden within our hearts. Nay, he implies that the thoughts thus revealed would at first, and for the more part, be evil thoughts, thoughts which betrayed hostility to the Lord and Saviour of men: for the Greek word (*διαλογισμοί*) here rendered "thoughts" almost always carries an evil implication in it, and denotes "the weary working of the understanding in the service of a bad heart." It conveys the idea that as Christ drew near to men the first effect of his presence and teaching would be to create a controversy, a *dialogue*, in the soul, in which the lower of the two voices would be the louder, and the worse would be made to appear the better cause.

On the whole, then, when we look at it at all carefully, the Prediction of Simeon has a very gloomy aspect, and speaks with a tone of sad foreboding in strange contrast to the riant tone of the Song of thanksgiving which immediately precedes it. But was it too gloomy for the facts? Was not every jot and tittle of it fulfilled within three and thirty years of its utterance? Is it not still finding a wide and large fulfilment?

When they were uttered, nothing could have seemed more improbable, more incredible, than the words of

¹ So the Greek word for "sword" implies.

Simeon ; for who, unless taught of God, could have anticipated that the Jews would passionately hate and oppose the Messiah for whose advent they had waited and prayed with strong desire ? And yet his words so exactly describe the effects of our Lord's earthly ministry that they might have been uttered *after* the event. He *was* set for the fall and the rising of many ; for the fall of the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, all that was held to be wisest and most religious in Israel ; and for the rise of publicans and sinners, peasants and fishermen, all that was held to be outcast and accursed in Israel. The most conspicuous result of the Advent on the men of his own time and race has been that it has turned their world upside down, "exalting them that were of low degree," and plucking down from their seats the high and mighty and wise, insomuch that we honour those whom they despised, and condemn those whom they honoured and revered. Christ *was* a Sign spoken against, and that not in Israel alone ; the historians of Rome have no better name for his teaching than an "execrable, extravagant, and malefic superstition," and thirty years after his death the Jews knew his followers only as a sect "which was everywhere spoken against." The Sword *did* pierce Mary's heart, and not hers alone, when she and those who loved and trusted Jesus saw Him persecuted, reviled, betrayed, and crucified, and feared that it was not by Him that God would redeem Israel. Christ and

his Word *were* a Touchstone by which the thoughts of many hearts were revealed and are still revealed. If we wanted to sum up the effect of his ministry on the Israel of his day, what better account of it could we give than this?—that it disclosed what men were thinking of, what they *were*, in their hearts, and proved their thoughts to be tainted with evil, proved that under all their apparent devotion to religion their hearts were estranged from God, and that they were unable to read and understand the sacred oracles which were their boast and pride. Is not the pure word of Christ still a touchstone, both in the world at large and in the individual soul? Wherever it comes with any power, does it not still excite a strife, a controversy, an opposition, which betrays our inmost thoughts, our real bent, our true character? Even if we accept it, is not its first effect upon us to shew us how much evil lurks in our nature, and how strong that evil is?

No truer picture of the results of Christ's advent and mission could even now be painted on a canvass so small as that of Simeon. With a few strokes, in a single sentence, he delineates and sums up the religious history of all the Christian centuries, no less than that of his own age. All our subsequent experience has but shewn how true was the inspiration by which he was moved.

Now there are three practical inferences to be drawn from this Prediction so important, because so pertinent

to our spiritual needs and moods, that I have abbreviated my exposition of it as much as I could in order to leave myself time to indicate them.

1. When the Word of Christ comes home to you, whether it come to quicken you to a new life, or to convince you of some truth which you had not recognized before, or had not reduced to practice, do not be amazed and discouraged if you stumble at it, if it awaken doubt and contradiction in your hearts, if you find it hard to believe, and still harder to live by. It is no strange thing which is happening to you, but the common and normal experience of all who believe in Him. The advent of Christ in the heart, his coming in power, *must* resemble his advent into the world, must create a strife between the good and the evil in your nature, must disclose so much that is evil in you as to make you fear goodness to be beyond your reach. How, but by the conviction of sin, can you be made penitent, and driven to lay hold on the Salvation which takes away sin? And the oftener Christ comes, the nearer He draws to you, the more fully He enters into your life—the deeper will be your conviction of sin, of a tainted and imperfect nature; till, at times, you will feel as if a sword had been thrust into your very soul. This, indeed, is what He comes to you for; to separate between the evil and the good, to make you conscious of evils you did not suspect, so conscious that you hate and long to be de-

livered from them. For "the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." The more resolutely you set yourselves to live by that Word, the more sensible will you become of certain inclinations and infirmities which oppose themselves to every advance you would make. As you follow Christ along the paths of truth and duty, new aspects of truth will present themselves to you, new duties will lay their claim upon you. And all your accepted beliefs and customary obediences may join the enemy for the moment, and resist the new light and the new claims. The more you multiply the points of attack, the more will the points and energies of resistance be multiplied, till your whole life seems a mere struggle, and often an ineffectual struggle, to be true to what you see and to do the thing you would, and you become practically familiar with that common anomaly of Christian experience which makes good men deem themselves weaker and more weak the stronger they grow, and think worse of themselves the better they are.

In such times of conflict and apparent failure, it will be an unspeakable comfort and encouragement to you to know, and to remember, that they are not peculiar to you, but common to all the children of God; that if Christ is to be formed in you, the hope of glory, He

must at first be as a Rock over which you will stumble, a Signal to call out all the contradictions and oppositions of your complex nature, a Sword which will pierce to your soul, a Touchstone which will disclose the quality of the material of which you are made, and shew you how evil many of your thoughts and dispositions are.

2. This, I say, is a great comfort, to know that our experience of the strife and pain and self-exposure which Religion breeds is an inevitable and common experience, which all who were in Christ before us have passed through, which has been deepest and most enduring in those who have followed Him most closely and served Him best. But it is not the only comfort or encouragement which the Prediction of Simeon suggests. If he had not foreseen the nearer and immediate results of Christ's advent, we might, as I have admitted, have distrusted him when he spake of its distant and ultimate results. If he had not told us of the conflict and sorrow, the self-exposure and self-contempt to which a faithful reception of Christ subjects us, we could hardly have believed him when he speaks of Christ as the Consolation for all sorrow, and the Light which is to glorify the whole dark world. But when we find all that he said of the nearer results of Christ's coming to be true, we can hardly help believing him when he speaks to us of its happy ultimate results. It

could hardly have seemed more improbable, at the time at which he spake, that the Christ should be despised and rejected by the Jews, than it now seems that these struggling and imperfect lives of ours are to pass and rise into a perfect freedom and a perfect peace; that the Light, which now strives confusedly with the darkness of our hearts, is one day to irradiate them with a beauty and a splendour which will make us meet to sit down with Christ in heavenly places. The one part of the Prediction has been fulfilled, improbable as it was: why should not the other part be fulfilled, incredible as it may seem?

Simeon has approved himself a faithful witness; we have found in our own experience that Christ is a Rock of stumbling and offence, a Signal which calls out all the opposition of an imperfect nature, a Sword which pierces the very soul and divides the evil in us from the good, a Touchstone which reveals our most secret thoughts and bents: let us also believe that He will be our Consolation, our Light, our Glory.

3. We may well believe it. *Per angusta ad augusta*, through a narrow way to a large place, through much struggle with many difficulties to a glorious end, through conflict to victory, seems to be the very motto of the Christian life. And this thought also is contained in Simeon's prediction. I have already spoken of the wide apparent disparity between his prophecy

of the immediate and his prophecy of the ultimate results of Christ's advent ; the one all strife and pain and shame, the other all consolation and peace, all light and glory. But what if the one be the way to the other? Simeon seems to imply that the one *is* the way to the other. It was by the Spirit of God he foretold that this Child was to be a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of Israel. It was by the selfsame Spirit he foretold that this Child was to be a Rock of offence, a Signal for contradiction, a Sword in the soul, a Touchstone to expose our inmost thoughts. And this latter prediction, conveyed in the words of my text, is so framed, especially in the Greek, as to imply, that it was *by a Divine intention*, and *in order to realize a gracious Divine end*, that Christ was to bring strife on the earth, to kindle an inward war, to disclose the lurking evils of the human heart. He was *set*, "*in order that* the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed "—set by God for this very purpose. So that when our thoughts are exposed, when we have to endure the inward conflict between evil and good, when the word of Christ pierces and rends our hearts, all is according to a Divine order, a Divine intention ; all is intended to prepare and conduct us to that Divine end, the salvation of our souls. It is all meant to prepare us for a time in which our souls shall be so flooded and suffused with the Divine Light that there shall be no

more darkness in us, so penetrated with the Divine Glory that sin and sorrow and shame shall for ever flee away. And if this be God's intention, if this is the end to which he is conducting us, who will not bear the strife and pain and self-contempt of this present imperfect life with patience, nay, with courage and with hope?

III.

THE REDEMPTION OF THE REDEEMER.

“And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were fulfilled, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord), and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”
—LUKE ii. 22-24.

THE law of Moses required that every Hebrew woman who had given birth to a man-child should be held unclean for forty days, and that during these days she should “touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary.” But, “when the days of her purification were accomplished,” she was to “bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt-offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin-offering, to the door of the tabernacle;” and the officiating priest, having “made an atonement for her,” she was pronounced “clean.” If unable to offer a lamb, she was to bring two turtledoves, or two pigeons. It was in obedience to this enactment that “Mary, when the days of her purification were

accomplished," brought her young Child to the temple, to present Him before the Lord, and offered her modest sacrifice of a pair of doves. And if the law which for forty days excluded the mother from the Sanctuary, and made all that she touched unclean, had a certain rigour in it, surely the law which appointed a yearling lamb and a young dove—the very symbols of innocence and beauty—a thank-offering for the birth of a child had a touch of poetry and tenderness in it which must have gone straight to every mother's heart. We naturally associate childhood, or at least infancy, with whatsoever is lovely and innocent and pure; and we can easily understand how, as the little procession went by, the mother carrying her babe and leading the lamb or caressing the dove, many hearts besides her own would be moved, and would revert for a moment to the purity and gentleness of those early days when all things seemed fair and everybody good.

Mary and Joseph were not rich, nor even "well-to-do," or they would not have brought the offering of poverty, two young pigeons. And if the mother of Christ was poor, there need be no shame in poverty; poverty can be no proof that He does not love us. Mary's pure and meditative heart was worth far more than many barns and much goods to bestow in them.

St. Luke speaks not of *her*, but of *their*, purification. And the word suggests, even if it does not mean, that

Mary came up to the temple *to purify her Son* as well as herself; came, not only to present Him before the Lord, but also *to ransom Him from the service of the priesthood*: all of which is perfectly true, whether Luke did or did not intend to convey it.

By the Hebrew law the firstfruits of every crop, and every male that first opened the womb whether of sheep, cattle, or other clean beasts, was set apart from the secular uses of life, and devoted to the "service of the Sanctuary. In like manner, the firstborn son of every family was holy to the Lord, set apart to the priestly function. This law, however, was soon commuted: "Behold," said God, "I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel *instead of all the firstborn.*" But, notwithstanding this substitution of one tribe for the firstborn of every tribe, the firstborn had still to be presented in the temple, and ransomed from the service of the temple by the payment of five of the Sanctuary shekels—about twelve shillings of our money. And the reason of this enactment seems to have been this: that just as one day in the week was sanctified in order to teach that every day is due and hallowed to God, and one place in order to shew that there is no place where He is not,¹ so one tribe was set apart for his service, not because the Levites were holier than other men, but to bear witness to the fact that all men are bound to serve

¹ See discourse on *The Consecration of the Firstlings*, Vol. II.

Him, bound therefore to a pure, righteous, and godly life. And, as the Jews found the lesson hard to learn, God helped them to learn it by ordaining that, though one tribe was wholly devoted to his service, and had been accepted in lieu of the firstborn, nevertheless the firstborn son of every family should be solemnly presented to Him, and redeemed from the service of his House by the payment of five shekels. Every separate family was thus reminded that that family, through all its members, was holy to the Lord ; that the substitution of the Levites did not exonerate them from his service, but rather bound them to it ; and that they, no less than the Levites, were under a solemn obligation to walk in all his ordinances and commandments blameless.

The particulars, the details, of Mary's obedience to this statute are not recorded, just as a thousand other details are not recorded, lest the world itself should not be able to hold the Book. But we *are* told that the parents of Jesus "brought him up to Jerusalem *to present him to the Lord*, as it is written in the law of the Lord, *Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord ;*" we are told that "they brought in the child Jesus *to do for him after the custom of the law.*" The statute is quoted, the obedience recorded in general terms. Had there been any departure from "the custom of the law," no doubt this also would have been recorded. As it is, we are left to conclude, and may

certainly conclude, that all was done in due order ; we may be sure that both the Babe and his mother were purified from their ceremonial uncleanness, and that the child Jesus was ransomed, by payment of the stipulated shekels, from the service of the Hebrew priesthood.

Now this redemption of the Redeemer, and this purification of the pure Son of God, if it chance to be new to you, may be a little perplexing. You may ask, "Why should He who knew no sin be purged from uncleanness? and why should the great High Priest of our confession be ransomed from the priestly service?" And the questions are worth asking, worth answering, since the answer to them may help to bring home to us both the essential humanity and the eternal priesthood of our Lord.

I. Let us enquire why the Holy Child was purified.

1. In the eye of the Hebrew law, the mother and her child were regarded as having one life, and the purification of the mother extended to and covered the child. Jesus, therefore, was purified in the purification of the Virgin Mary. Why? Simply that in this, as in all other respects, He might be made like unto his brethren. True that in Him there was no uncleanness, no sin. But just as it became Him to be circumcised, although He was born without "the foreskin of the heart;" just as it became Him to submit to the baptism of repentance, although He had no guilt to wash away; so also it

became Him to be purified, although He was not unclean. Sinless, He appeared "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Our limitations and infirmities were in his manhood, though our iniquities were not. It was meet, therefore, that He who "took not on him the nature of angels," but that "flesh and blood," that mortal and peccable nature of which "the children were partakers," should observe those ordinances by which the infirmities of the flesh were counteracted, and to the observance of which all "the sons of the law" were bound. "The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one ; wherefore He is not ashamed to call them brethren : " but how should the divine Sanctifier be one with the sanctified among men unless He assumed their very nature, and became perfect by obeying the very law by obedience to which they attain perfection ? How, except by this identity of nature and of obedience, could He become so one with them as that, in raising Himself, He should raise them, and glorify their humanity in glorifying his own ? If He had not been circumcised, and purified, and baptized with them, how should they have been " crucified together with him " and " made to sit together with him in heavenly places " ? Every link which bound and drew Him down to them was also a link which bound them to Him, and by which He will in due time draw them up to Himself. To demonstrate his essential humanity, to multiply the points of contact and attach-

ment between Him and the race He came to save,—this was why He had to submit to all the ordinances, as well as keep all the commandments, whether of the former or of the present Dispensation.

2. Every divine ordinance has a power in it and a gift. If duly observed, it ministers strength and grace, subdues, or helps to subdue, the evil that is in us, to unfold and augment that which is good. And why should we not believe that the divine ordinances which found their fulfilment in Christ, also communicated their power to Him? We admit that his manhood was developed and trained, as ours is, by a gradual process, a process of growth; that He learned by the experience which life brought Him, and was exalted by the ennobling ministry of death. Why not also admit and believe that this gradual process was wrought in the normal way; that He grew, as we grow, by a daily resistance to evil, an enlarging obedience to the Divine commandments, a faithful observance of all good customs, all Divine ordinances? It is through these channels that the Divine influence, the Divine grace, reaches us; and through these channels it reached Him. The circumcision and purification of Christ were but the first steps of an ascending series which led Him on, through the public dedication of Himself to the service of God when He was twelve years old, and the observance of the Hebrew fasts and feasts and sabbaths,

to the baptism of John and the final Passover, which, at his touch, flowered into Christian baptism and the sacrament of the Supper. All these ordinances He kept in order that in all things He might be made like unto his brethren, and fulfil all their righteousness : and doubtless He received from each of them its special gift and power.

And He became like unto his brethren in all things in order to quicken in us the hope that, in all things, we may become like Him ; to give us the assurance that He came to breathe his spirit into our spirits and to conform us to his image.

3. It lends the last perfecting touch to this thought if we remember that, not only was Jesus purified, but purified together with his mother. For, surely, this union of the immaculate Child with the maculate woman brings home to us the conviction, that the Divine does not shrink from fellowship with the human, that the sinless Lord is of one nature with sinful men, and can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. To see Jesus and Mary joined in one act of worship, before one and the same altar, is such a revelation of the Divine love and humility as should be a perennial fountain of hope in our hearts. He became of one flesh with us, that we might become of one spirit with Him. He took our uncleanness on Him, that we might become partakers of his righteousness.

II. But if it seem strange that He who was without sin should be cleansed, it can hardly seem less strange that *the Redeemer should be redeemed*, that the only true Priest of men should be ransomed from the priestly office and function. Yet a certain superficial solution of the difficulty is obvious. For Jesus Christ came, after the flesh, of the tribe of Judah, not of the tribe of Levi, of the royal tribe, not of the sacerdotal. And if it behoved Him to have respect to the laws of our common humanity, and, in particular, to the laws of the Hebrew nation, it also became Him to respect the laws of his tribe. He came to fulfil, not to violate, the Divine order. And hence, a son of Judah by birth, He could not become a Hebrew priest, but must be ransomed, as the firstborn of his tribe were ransomed, from the service of the temple.

This is one answer to the question, "Why was the Priest ransomed, the Redeemer redeemed?" And it is a conclusive answer so far as it goes. But it does not go very far or deep. The Writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews invites us to take a larger view, and furnishes us with a more conclusive reply. He suggests that, precisely *because* Christ was the true Priest of men, He could not enter the Hebrew priesthood. The true, the universal priest, he tells us, must be consecrated by eternal and invisible, not by visible and temporal, sanctions. He must not be a son of Levi, or a priest

of Aaron's order, but "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." "Perfection," he argues, "could not come by the Levitical priesthood;" and therefore "there ariseth another priest who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." To this Great High Priest the sons of Aaron bore witness, but an imperfect witness. They were the shadows which He cast before; and the priestly, like other shadows, was often black, distorted, variable, always imperfect. Because perfection could not come by the Levites, the perfect Priest must be redeemed from their office and service.

In fine, the Epistle signalizes three points in which the Hebrew priests bore witness to Christ, but in which, while He resembled, He so far transcended them as to prove Himself a priest of another order and higher functions. (1) They were "ordained for men;" (2) they were "ordained by God;" (3) they were "ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices." Let us glance at each of these points for a moment, and so come to a close.

1. They were *ordained for men*. The Levites were not to be, like the heathen priesthoods, a separate caste, having no vital bonds of union, no social relations, with their brethren. They were to be *of* their brethren, that they might be *for* them. A certain ceremonial purity was conferred upon them, but it was only ceremonial, and it was not conferred for their own sakes. In their

personal life and character they were no better than other Jews. They had to offer sacrifices for *their own* sins before they could atone for the sins of the people. Their holiness was a purely official and representative holiness: they were set apart from certain common and secular uses of life, invested with a certain sacredness, in order that the whole people might be constantly reminded of *their* holy calling. They were ordained for men, for the sake of their neighbours. The Shekinah was a type of the whole priestly system; it was a Light, but a Light involved in a cloud. And if ever the Light was to break through and absorb the cloud, it must be at the coming of One mightier than they; One in whom their legal sanctity should be replaced by an unsullied personal holiness; One who should not only remind men that they ought to be holy, but be able to *make* them holy, to communicate to them the virtue and the power of his own spotless life.

2. They were *ordained by God*. God had elected the sons of Levi to minister at his altar. By regular succession, by right of birth, or, as the Epistle phrases it, "by the law of a carnal commandment," they were admitted to the priesthood. Most of them were without any special fitness for their special work; many of them were, ethically, quite unfit for it. The accident of birth decided their vocation; and hence it was, I suppose, that throughout the long Old Testament history, we

meet with very few priests who are conspicuous for commanding intellect, or patriotism, or piety. The true Priest, the world's Priest, must have a higher call, a diviner ordination. He must be a priest "after the order of Melchizedek," deriving his office, not from birth, or any accident of time, but from personal character, from inward bent and fitness. His priesthood is not to be hereditary or transmissible : it is to spring from an immediate Divine call and inspiration ; it is to begin and end with Himself. *Christ* is not to be a priest "after the law of a carnal commandment," but in virtue of "the power of an indissoluble," and therefore a perfect, "life." His sacrifice is really to take away sin ; his absolution to remove guilt and to give peace ; His intercession is to be effectual and to prevail. And therefore He is ransomed from the service of a priesthood which, though ordained of God, could "make nothing perfect," and only dealt with the shadows of good things to come.

3. They were *ordained to offer sacrifice*. Evening and morning, at weekly sabbaths and annual festivals, the sons of Aaron brought gifts and offerings before the Lord. "In these sacrifices lay a continually recurring remembrance of sin." They spoke of a guilt they could not take away ; for they could only "sanctify to the purifying of the flesh : " "they could not make him who did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience."

Even among the Jews every spiritually-minded man knew that God took no delight in sacrifice and burnt-offering ; that *his* sacrifices were a contrite heart, an obedient life, a will conformed to the Divine Will. The true Priest, therefore, even according to the Hebrew conception of Him, must present the true sacrifice ; He must surrender will and life to God. As "every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices, . . . it is of necessity that this man should have somewhat also to offer"—that "somewhat" being the true ideal Sacrifice. He must make so complete a surrender of Himself unto God as to cause a similar surrender in as many as truly believe on Him. Hence, "when the Christ cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire ; burnt-offering and sin-offering thou hast not required. Lo, I come *to do thy will ; I delight to do thy will*, O my God : yea, *thy law is within my heart.*"

This is the very essence and perfection of sacrifice. It is this which makes his one offering able "to purge our consciences from dead works," and "eternally to perfect them that are sanctified." Only He who had the law in his heart, only He whose will never swerved from the will of God, only He could be the true Priest of men, and take away the sin of the world. For it is in this immutable union of the human will with the Divine Will that the at-one-ment consists.

Here, then, we reach the real large reason for the redemption of the Redeemer from the Levitical priesthood. Christ came to offer, not their ineffectual sacrifices, but the one great Sacrifice which alone gave any value to their offerings, and by which alone the world could be reconciled unto God. His sanctions were not their sanctions, but higher and diviner, since He was ordained of God, not through the accident of birth, but by an immediate personal call, an inherent and eternal fitness. His functions were not their functions, but higher and diviner, since He was ordained for men, not by a legal sanctity or a ceremonial cleanness, but by a substantial and unblemished holiness.

In fine, He was at once in harmony, and in contrast, with their whole institute. He had in Himself all that the Aaronic priesthood possessed, and infinitely more. He gathered up into Himself, not only their limited vocation and service, but all true priesthoods and all true sacrifices the world over and time through, possessing all and transcending all. And, hence, He is *the* Priest, the great High Priest, not of the Hebrew race alone, nor of any race, but of all tribes and kindreds and tongues ; his Sacrifice takes away, not my sins or your sins alone, but the sin of the whole world.

IV.

GOD IS LOVE.

"The Lord hath recalled thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and as a wife of youth who hath been despised, saith thy God. For a small moment did I cast thee out, but with great compassion will I gather thee. In a sudden flush of wrath I hid my face from thee, but with everlasting kindness will I have compassion on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.¹ For it is now with me as at the flood of Noah; whereas I swore that the flood of Noah should no more sweep over the earth, so I swear that I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For though the mountains should remove, and the hills should quake, my loving-kindness for thee shall not remove, neither shall my covenant of peace quake, saith the Lord that hath compassion on thee. O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, not comforted, behold I will set thy stones in antimony,² and lay thy foundation with sapphires; and I will make thy battlements of rubies, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy boundaries of precious stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children."—ISAIAH liv. 6-13.

NONE of those who came before the Lord Jesus ventured

¹ Literally, thy *Goel*, i.e., the redeeming Kinsman.

² "Antimony" was the costly black mineral powder with which the Eastern women painted their eyelids to throw up the lustre of their eyes. The dark cement in which the gems of the walls, gates, battlements, and even the foundations of the City were to be set, and which was to enhance their brilliance, was to be composed of this costly pigment.

to define God as love. But it does not follow, as we sometimes assume, that the holy men who were moved by the Holy Ghost before Christ came into the world did not know and teach the fatherly and redeeming love of God. They could not be so familiar with that love as we are ; but that they recognized it, and insisted on it with rare force and pathos, that they did all that mere words could do to convince and persuade men of it, no candid student of the Old Testament will deny, although when they were most profoundly moved by it we can still detect in their language a certain accent of almost incredulous surprise. They have to pause, amid the rush and torrent of emotion, to assure and reassure themselves that they are not going beyond the word of the Lord. But, pause as often as they will, and though they may seem to hesitate as if in doubt, they do not really doubt. On the contrary, they are sure that, like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him ; and that, far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed their transgressions from them.

Isaiah, for example, as he utters the pathetic phrases of my text, can hardly believe for joy and wonder. But it is only joy and wonder which make him incredulous. He has no reason for doubt, save that the Love which is being revealed to him appears too marvellous to be true. Again and again he is compelled to

remind himself that it is God who is speaking in him and through him. The tender phrases which, were they not so tender, might run on with even flow, are again and again broken with such words as "*saith thy God,*" or "*saith the Lord thy Redeemer,*" or "*saith the Lord that hath compassion on thee.*" It is as though he found the words he was moved to speak so divinely tender and of so wide a compass, so far transcending all bounds of hope, that, if not incredible to him, they would at least be incredible to those who listened to them; as though he had constantly to assure himself, and them, that there was warrant for them, that it was no one less than God Himself from whom they came.

Do you wonder that Isaiah, who knew God so well, found it hard to believe in a love so tender and so true, and feared that his hearers would find it quite impossible to believe?

Ah, but consider who, and what, they were on whom he was told that God had set his heart, and all the treasures of his love and compassion! They were sinners above all other men. God had lavished on them every possible means of grace, insomuch that He both could, and did, appeal to them whether there was even one single thing He could have done for them which He had not done. Yet, despite his singular and boundless grace, they had sunk to the level, and below the level, of the heathen around them. They had forsaken

the God who had redeemed and exalted them, broken his law, abandoned his worship. Sensual and corrupt, impure, dishonest, unjust, their very prophets prophesied lies, and even the hands of the priests were full of blood. Was it likely that God should love *them* ?

Consider, too, how stern and dreadful was the burden which Isaiah had been commissioned to denounce upon them. He had been sent to utter woe on woe, to foretell, as the inevitable issue of their sins, that their goodly land should become a wilderness, their fair cities sink in flame to blackened ruins, and their inhabitants be consumed by pestilence, war, invasion. And God had been as good as his word. Assyrian and Chaldean armies had swept the land of its inhabitants; their cities were burned with fire, and the once fertile and wealthy land turned into a desert. All who were left of the people were carried away captive, and left to weep for seventy years over their unstrung harps as they sat by the waters of Babylon.

It was to these sinful miserable captives and exiles that the Prophet was moved to proclaim the tender and inalienable love of God ! Is it any marvel that he was amazed, or even incredulous ? *Could* God really love the people whom He had smitten with stroke upon stroke, till they were robbed of all that men hold dear ? Was the very anger which smote them only one of the forms of that love ? Was it possible that He could really care

for men so foul and base, go on loving them and caring for them in the teeth of all their offences, and renew and redouble his endeavours to redeem them the more deeply they sank into bondage to their lusts? Was it conceivable that He should yearn for creatures such as these as a mother yearns for her children, as a lover longs for his bride?

It *was* incredible, my brethren ; it *is* incredible : and, nevertheless, it is utterly and altogether true.

Isaiah is filled, and might well be filled, with amazement as he overhears the soliloquy of Jehovah. As he listens to the tender divine phrases in which the holy Inhabitant of Eternity utters all his compassion and all his desire, the Prophet believes not for joy and wonder. And yet he does believe. He doubts neither that it is God who speaks, nor that He means what He says. He keeps assuring himself, and us, that it *is* the Lord, and that this Lord is our Redeemer, who has compassion upon us.

And, indeed, the words authenticate themselves. None but God *could* have spoken them. No *man* would have dared to conceive of God—no man, untaught of Heaven, ever has conceived of God, as yearning with love for the human race ; and still less could any man have invented the tender, melting, beseeching phrases in which Isaiah has clothed that conception. *The words are so human that they must be divine.* So far from being able to

invent them, men can very hardly believe them—Isaiah himself, as we have just seen, could hardly believe them. And even we, who know, or ought to know, so much more of the love of God than he did, find it almost impossible to believe that God should have uttered them. Even *we* should not have dared to put these words into his mouth. We can hardly believe that He means half which the words convey.

For mark what the words do convey. God is speaking to men who had persistently sinned against all the influences of his love and grace, to men who were being consumed by the inevitable results of their transgressions. And He tells these poor miserable creatures that they are as dear to Him as the bride to her husband ; that, though their offences against Him have been so many and so deep, He cannot tear his love for them out of his heart. Nay, as if this were not enough, He goes on to say that, though the blame is none of his, He is willing to take all the blame of their offences on Himself. Instead of reproaching them for their sins against his love, He compares them to a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, to a young and tender bride whose husband has despised and disgraced her, refusing to live with her and sending her away from his tent. It is *He* who has abandoned her, not she who has abandoned Him. It is He who has been hard and stern, not she who has been wilful and gone astray. But He never *meant* to be hard and stern.

It was only for a brief moment that He left her, and in a momentary flush of anger. If she will return to Him, and give Him another chance, He will welcome her with "great mercies" and comfort her with an "everlasting kindness." How shall He persuade her to return, to trust in Him? how convince her that He will be angry with her no more? He calls heaven and earth to witness to his truth, his fidelity, his deathless and unchanging love. He cannot appeal to his covenant with her, with Israel. She may think that *that* has been broken both by Him and by herself. But there was one of his covenants that had never been broken, an unconditional covenant, the covenant with Noah, which did not depend on men and their obedience, which depended only on God and on his faithfulness to his word. Henceforth his covenant with her shall be as "the waters of Noah;" He will no more fail in his love to her than He will suffer the earth to be wasted by another flood. He will never forsake her, even though she should forsake Him; never be wroth with her, nor rebuke her, even though she should still be wilful and provoke Him to anger. Nay, more; as if even this great promise were not enough, He casts about for another and a still more reassuring figure, and goes on to say: the mountains were planted and the hills stood firm before the deluge swept over the earth; even the waters of Noah could not wash *them* away, nor so much as make them quake. And his love shall hence-

forth be firm and unchanging as the mountains and hills ; nay, more firm and unchanging. The mountains *may* remove, and the hills may quake ; but his lovingkindness shall never remove, his covenant of peace shall never quake.

Even all this, wonderful and incredible as it is, is not enough. There is the sigh of an infinite compassion and truth in the exclamation, " O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, not comforted ! " There is an unbounded and divine generosity in the promise to the bride, *to the woman*, that, if she will only come back to Him, her very palace shall be built of rare gems ; and in the promise *to the mother*, than which no promise could be more dear to a mother's heart, " All *thy children* shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children."

Is *that* a fable of man's invention ? Can it be ? Would any man have dared to give it as a statement of the facts, or possible facts, of human life ? Is it not utterly incredible that any man should have conceived of God as pleading with the most sinful outcasts of the race like an impassioned lover pleading with his bride ? as taking all the blame of our faithlessness, all the burden of our sins, on Himself ? as seeking to win us back by vows and oaths and promises in which it is impossible for Him to lie ? as pledging Himself to be true to us even though we should be untrue to Him, and to follow us with an everlasting kindness, wander how and where we will ?

Is it not, on the contrary, so impossible for any one of us to have conceived of God thus that we can hardly persuade ourselves that such a conception of Him can be true now that we have it on his own authority and as from his own lips? We find it *so* difficult to believe in a Love like this that I should not be at all surprised if many of you, while I have been trying to give you the sense of Isaiah's words, have been looking at your Bibles again and again to see if I were not straining his words, and making them mean more than they could possibly have meant; or if you have discovered, with a certain awe and amazement, that they mean and imply far more than I have been able to bring out.

I should not be surprised, because there is much room, much reason even, for your doubts—reason in ourselves, in the world around us, and even in the teaching of the Church. We are not worthy of such a love as this, and know that we are not worthy of it. We have forsaken God; why, then, should not He forsake us? We have sinned against his law, though we admit that law to be holy, just, and good, and obedience to it the only way of life and peace. Our own hearts condemn us; and if our hearts condemn us, why should not He who is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things?

Nay, He does condemn us. Our life is darkened by the consequences of our transgressions. The world around us is full of miseries bred by sin. The laws by

which God governs men are hard and stern. They make no allowance for our errors, our infirmities, our temptations, or even for our honest mistakes. However innocently we offend, we have to take our punishment. However deep and sincere our contrition, no repentance will avert that punishment, or melt the links which bind evil consequences to evil deeds.

And if, shamed by the sense of sin, or stung by the misery of the world, we turn for comfort to the Church, what comfort has the Church to offer us? Theology has been, the popular theology still is, as hard and stern as Nature herself, and speaks to us of a God who is angry every day; who could only be placated by an agony and sacrifice beyond the reach of thought, and only be very imperfectly placated even by that, since He turns the nations into hell, and saves only an elect remnant, into whose ranks we have no power to enter.

What wonder, then, that we who have long been steeped in such a theology as this find it hard to believe in the fatherly and redeeming love of God for sinful men, even when He Himself sets Himself to convince and persuade us of that love? Our hearts, which were made by Him, condemn us. The laws by which He rules our life condemn and punish us. The Church condemns us, or the vast majority of us, to an endless torment and death? What hope is left us? to whom can we turn?

Ah, my brethren, let us turn, in simple childlike faith to God, the Lord of the Church and the Father of us all, and listen to the voice which speaks from heaven. *We* are not so wise as He is; we confess we know but little whether of Nature or of human life, and cannot trust our interpretation of what they teach. Even theologians are not so wise as God, and do not claim to be as wise, confident as they are in their reading of his will. Let us listen to *Him* rather than to them, or to ourselves.

God says He is our Father. And a father does not abandon his children because they are weak and wayward, and disobey his will to their own hurt. He, rather, expects them to be weak and wayward while they are children, and sets himself by counsel and discipline, by patient forgiveness, by unfailing tenderness, to correct their errors, to recover them to obedience, to train them for the duties and responsibilities of maturer life. God says that his love for us is more true and tender, more patient, more all-forgiving and all-enduring than that of a mother; and that even if a mother should so far forget her nature as to pluck her babe from her bosom, He can never pluck us from his heart. God says—you have heard Him saying it this morning—that his love for us, even when we are at our worst, is a passion more ardent than that of a lover for his bride, more steadfast than that of a husband for the wife of his youth. He takes the burden and the blame

of our sins on Himself. He makes excuse for us when we can make none for ourselves. He assures us that He suffers more than we do in all our miseries and afflictions. He confesses that for a moment He has been angry with us, that in a sudden access of wrath He has hidden his face from us. He will not even remind us that it was our sins against his love which made Him angry, or that his very anger was intended to make us sorry for our sins, and to set us longing for the comfort of his love. Instead of reproaching us, He sighs over us with an infinite compassion, and movingly beseeches us to return to Him. He pledges Himself, with vow on vow, promise on promise, to receive us with great mercy, to follow us with an everlasting kindness, to bless us with a love more stedfast and enduring than the mountains which not even the Flood could shake, a love which will not change with our changes, but be true even though we should prove untrue.

Do you hesitate to believe in such a love as this? Do you still think there must be a mistake somewhere, because you can see no reason for a love like this, no probability of it? Is it still incredible that the love of God for you should be deep and pure, ardent and stedfast, as that of a father for his child, a mother for her babe, a lover for his bride, a husband for his wife? Tell me, then, whence did these pure flames of human love spring? Did they not come from God? Was it

not He who made man and woman, father and mother, lover and husband, and made them what they are? And must not the Fountain from which all love springs be infinitely purer and deeper than any of the streams which flow from it? Is it possible that the love of man or woman, even in its most heroic or most pathetic forms, can be truer, warmer, tenderer, of a more enduring and withstanding fidelity than that of God? Are they not, must they not be, only faint, though fair, reflections of the Love from which they sprang? or will you argue that sunshine is hotter than the sun?

Do you still hesitate? Do you ask for some instance in which God openly shewed, or distinctly proclaimed, his love for men as faulty and sinful as yourselves, whose life was as dark as yours, whose nature as weak and unstable? Consider, then, who they were to whom *this* message of love was first sent? Are you more faulty or more guilty than the Jews who had lost home and temple, liberty and native land, for and by their sins? Are your lives darker and more burdened than were those of the exiles who wept by the waters of Babylon as they bethought them of all they had lost? Remember, then, how God pleaded with them—not simply by assuring them of forgiveness, redemption, love, but piling sentence on sentence, metaphor on metaphor, appeal on appeal, promise on promise, if by any means He might win them back to Himself.

And, finally, consider this. "Men do not get what they want because they do not want the best," or do not want it first and most. Hence they mistake and resent the Love which presses the best upon them, and will not let them rest until they accept it. They want ease, enjoyment, gain, success ; they do not want, or do not want first and most of all, a clean heart, a right spirit, a loving and obedient life. It is long before we any of us learn what the best things really are, and still longer before we learn to desire them above all else. And when, in his love, God scourges us from our lazy paradise, and drives us, up the mountain and through the cloud, to the heaven of being righteous even as He is righteous and perfect even as He is perfect, we mistake for anger the love which can be content with nothing short of the best for us, and find in the toil and suffering which are a discipline of perfection only his displeasure or our calamity.

If there is to be any comfort, any hope, any peace in our life, if we are to be sustained under the sorrows and changes of time, if we are to meet death without fear because we look for a happy immortality, we *must* set our hearts on the best things, and be sure both that God so loves us that He will give us the best, and that He is preparing us to take and enjoy the best by all the discipline, all the toil and sorrow and anguish, through which we are passing. And, therefore, I beseech you

to believe in his love, in his love *for you*, to believe that it is purer, deeper, more forgiving and more enduring, than the warmest human love in its most faithful and tenderest forms. Mark the manner, as well as the substance, of my text. Remember that God is not content to give you the plain avowal or assurance of a love on which you may always count ; but that He dwells on it, lingers over it, throws it into many forms, and these forms so tender, so touching and appealing, that even the hardest heart cannot listen to them unmoved. Do you say, "God is too great and high to care much for me"? Hear what "thy God" saith: "The Lord hath recalled thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and as a wife of youth who has been despised." Do you object, "But I have sinned against Him ; I have broken his laws, resisted his grace, turned away from his love and service"? Hear what "the Lord thy Redeemer" saith, and how He interprets your relations to Himself, taking blame on Himself rather than casting blame on you: "For a small moment did I cast thee out, but with great compassion will I gather thee ; in a sudden flush of wrath I hid my face from thee, but with everlasting kindness will I have compassion on thee." Do you object again, "But I am still full of faults, still compassed with infirmity. I am only too likely to repeat in the future the sins which I lament in the past. And if I do, must I not fall away from his love"? Hear

what saith "the Lord who hath compassion on thee :"
"For it is now with me as at the flood of Noah : whereas
I swore that the flood of Noah should no more sweep
over the earth, so I swear that I will not be wroth with
thee nor rebuke thee. For though the mountains should
remove and the hills should quake, my lovingkindness
for thee shall not remove, neither shall my covenant of
peace quake."

Is not this the very and authentic voice of Love?
Could any man have put these heart-melting words into
the mouth of God ? Must not He who is love have put
them into the mouth of his servant ? Listen, then, to
Him. Believe and respond to the love God hath toward
you. Seek first his kingdom and righteousness. Recogn-
ize in all the changes and sorrows of time the discipline
by which, in his love, He is making you perfect. And
having thus made sure of the best things, all else that
you need shall be added unto you, all really "precious"
things shall be yours, whether in heaven or on earth.

V.

PRAYER AND PROMISE.

"For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."—MATTHEW vii. 8.

WHEN our Lord speaks of prayer, He speaks with emphasis, as One who knows how men doubt the worth of prayer, and would fain banish all doubt. If He says, "Ask, and it shall be given you," He instantly repeats the promise in a slightly heightened form, and adds, "Seek, and ye shall find;" nay instantly re-repeats the promise in another and still more strenuous form, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Whether by these repetitions He intended to mark a growing earnestness in the soul that is drawn into a sincere communion with the Giver of all good, so that from simple asking it kindles into strenuous seeking, and from seeking into an importunity which will not be silenced or denied; or whether, with the natural and unstudied rhetoric of a born teacher of men, He instinctively employed stronger phrases as He repeated the same

thought, scholars have not determined, and we need not discuss. It is enough to mark that, as if to put an end to the strife of doubt within our souls, He thrice assures us in a single sentence that, if we seek "good gifts" of our Father who is in heaven, we cannot ask in vain.

Nay, more ; He is not content with even three repetitions of his promise. In the very next sentence, as if to close every loophole for doubt and fear, as if to compel our wavering hearts to settle into an unwavering trust, He repeats the promise three times more, in almost, but happily not in quite, the self-same, words. For now, while using the same words in the main, He infuses a tone of universality into his promise which is full of comfort for us when once we comprehend it. Immediately after his direct promise to us, "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," He assigns as a reason why we should accept and rely on his promise the fact : "For *everyone* that asketh^s receiveth ; and he (*i.e.*, "everyone" again) that seeketh findeth ; and to him (again to "everyone") that knocketh it shall be opened."

The only new point in this second threefold repetition of the promise is its universality, that its scope is enlarged from "us" till it embraces "everyone." And so perverse are we, so much the enemies of our own peace, that the very reason which our Lord adduces for the confirmation of our faith may, at first, only relax its

hold. In our narrow and selfish moods we are apt to assume that what is ours alone is most of all ours ; that that is not strictly our own over which our neighbours have any right or claim, and, much more, if not only some, but all, men share it with us. And hence a promise made to everybody may seem all the less, instead of all the more, made to us. But no sooner do we reflect than we find that all the best things, the things which are most precious and most indispensable, are precisely those which are open and common to all men. The air we breathe, the water of which we drink, the bread we eat, the beauty of the earth, the pomp and glory of the skies, the thoughts by which we are most deeply and beneficially stirred, the kinships and sympathies of the home, of friendship, of love, are not and cannot be ours exclusively. These, and the like, good gifts are common to many, if not to all, of our neighbours. Why even to eat a meal alone is not to enjoy a meal ; you must share it with others if you are to *enjoy* it. You cannot look on any scene of natural beauty without glancing round for some one to partake it with you, and, by partaking, to make it doubly beautiful, and doubly yours. No generous man, no man worth calling a man, can fully enjoy his own happiness while he feels that others are miserable, or his own liberty so long as he knows that his neighbours are enslaved. No man can be really good without

striving to make others good ; in proportion as his faith in God and goodness is precious to him, he longs that other men should be animated by like precious faith.

The best things are the most common, the most universal ; and the best men are those who are most bent on sharing with others all that they possess and enjoy.

In proportion as we are men, then, and good men, the universality of this promise will make it dear to us. We shall love and trust our Lord's assurance that our prayers are answered all the more because *everyone* that asketh receiveth, and *everyone* that seeks the true wealth finds it ; because to *everyone* that knocks at the gate of heaven, it is opened.

We may reach the same conclusion by a lower and a more selfish road. You who doubt whether God listens to your prayers, whether He will give you the good gifts you ask of Him, tell me how God could meet your doubts, how He could induce you to put your trust in Him.

By a promise made to a few elect souls ? You know very well that, if such a promise were made, it would be with *you* as it is with many who think that such a promise *has* been made, that the mercy of God *is* confined within such narrow bounds. You would be always suspecting that you were not of the few, fearing that you were not of the elect, that you were excluded from a mercy so narrow and capricious as this.

Would even a written promise, flung down from Heaven, *with your name inserted in it*, assure your faith? You know very well that it would not. You would fear lest it was meant for some other person of the same name, or lest it should have been made when you were comparatively innocent, and had not contracted the evil taints by which you are polluted now; or, comparing yourselves with many to whom no such promise was sent, and confessing that they were far more worthy of it than you, you would suspect the origin, or the meaning of the promise, and persuade yourselves either that it did not come from above, or that it was contingent on conditions which you had failed to fulfil.

But if the promise is made to "*everyone*," if it simply embodies *a law* of the spiritual world, what ingenious evasion of it can even the heart most prone to doubt devise? You may not be worthy of any unique or special gift; you may not be able to reckon yourselves among the *élite*, or elect, of the earth: but you cannot argue yourselves beyond the scope of that which is given to every man. You cannot suspect that God will repeal a law of his kingdom simply to exclude you from that kingdom. You cannot fear that what He grants to every man, He will withhold from you.

Behold the comfort, then, and accept the assurance, of this great promise: "*Everyone* that asketh receiveth; everyone that seeketh findeth; to everyone that knocketh

it shall be opened." It is the best kind of promise ; for it is made to *us* only because it is true of all men. It is the best kind of promise because, since it is made to all, we cannot possibly be excluded from it.

But here you may say, "*It is* a great promise and full of comfort ; at least it *would be* if it were true, if the facts of life verified it. But is it true ? is it not disproved, rather than verified, by the facts of daily experience ?" And by this question you touch the very heart of the matter. It is a question worth discussing—a question which I shall be very happy to discuss with you, because it comes close home to our experience, because it is vital to our faith.

But, in discussing it, I shall and must assume, that you are no longer children, but men ; that you have learned to discriminate values, and to prefer the best things over things of inferior worth ; that you do not want to impose your will on God, but to learn what his will for you is, because you believe his will to be wiser, purer, kinder than your own. I shall assume that, even if you could do it, you would not bring rain on the earth simply because you wished for rain, or fair weather because you wished for fair weather, lest, in indulging your wishes, you should injure your interests, or in promoting your own interests should injure the interests of others. I shall and must assume, in short, that you are wise enough to lay the main stress of your question on

the larger and more spiritual aspects of the Promise ; that you no longer want to know whether God will give you whatever you choose to ask for, but whether He will give you the things which make for well-being, the best things, the most valuable and enduring, the things which pertain to life and godliness.

And I assume all this because our Lord Himself makes the assumption, and we can only discuss the problem which his words suggest so long as we bear in mind how He conditions that problem, and what it is that his words imply. In this discourse on Prayer, *He* takes it for granted that you will ask for "*good* gifts," for "bread" and for "fish," not for "stones" and for "serpents," not for that which will only weigh you down and hold you back, nor for the cold, selfish, serpentine cunning which seeks only its own ends, and has none but visible and temporal ends. And He encourages you to set your heart on these "*good* things," and to aim your prayers at them, by the promise, which is also an argument, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven (and in whom there is no evil) give good things to them that ask him."

What our Lord had in his mind, what and what kind of thing, when He spoke of the "good things" which the good Father is always ready to bestow on his seeking children, we may gather from St. Luke's report of the

very promise which we have just heard from St. Matthew. In St. Luke (Chap. xi. 13) this promise is given with only one, but that a most significant, variation : " If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give *the Holy Spirit* to them that ask him." Obviously our Lord assumes, as I have assumed, that you will care most for the best things, for the things which make for life and peace ; and that if you can only be sure of receiving *these* when you ask for them, you will cheerfully leave God to add to them whatever inferior things you may also need. As you well may ; for if God will give you that which is greatest, why should He withhold from you that which is least, save only when lesser things would hinder and embarrass your reception of the greatest and the best ? He assumes that when you ask for "good gifts," what you will seek most earnestly of all will be " the Holy Spirit," the Spirit which will make you holy. In other words, He gives you credit for desiring above all else a wise and righteous, a pure and kindly heart, because, having this, you have all that pertains to life and godliness ; because, having this, you have all things and abound.

And I devoutly trust, my brethren, that He does not give you more credit than you deserve. Most of you at least, I think, must have lived long enough and have had sufficient experience of life, to have learned that a right

spirit, a pure and loving heart, is God's best gift to man ; that, without this, all else is vain ; that, with this, all is won. I hope that there is no fate which would be so dreadful to you, none from which you would shrink with such loathing and fear, as to be allowed to go smoothly and prosperously on your way while you had a mean and foolish, an unrighteous and an unloving spirit within you, a spirit so bent on selfish and sordid aims as to have no eyes for what was above and beyond them. I would fain believe that you would welcome any loss, any tribulation, if only you knew that it would purify and elevate your spirit ; if only you were sure that, by bringing you a larger wisdom and a warmer love, it would add to the fulness and completeness of your life, and draw you into a closer fellowship with the Spirit of all truth and grace.

Well, this is the attitude and posture of the soul for which *Christ* gives you credit. He assumes that, when you pray, you will ask for good gifts, and that by good gifts you will understand above all the gift of that Holy Spirit of God which alone can make you holy, and wise, and kind. And He promises you that, if you ask for this renewing, enlarging, uplifting Spirit, it shall be given you ; that if you seek, you shall find it ; that if it is for this you knock, the gate shall be opened unto you. "Men do not get what they want, because they do not want the best." If you really want the best, our Lord assures you that you *shall* get it.

Read thus, in its connection and true meaning, do you any longer ask if the Promise is true, if it is verified by the facts of experience? It is plainly and obviously true—as all the promises are when once we understand them; and that in two ways.

First, if you ask, that is, if you seek, and seek with an earnest and stedfast importunity, for the best things—for a clean heart, a right spirit, a will attuned to the will of God—God has already in some measure given them to you. These deep and earnest cravings for goodness are the germ and beginning of all goodness. They have been implanted, kindled, sustained in you by his good Spirit. You *have*, therefore, before you ask, and that you may ask. Your very prayer is itself a proof that your prayer has been heard; your quest a proof that you have found; your knocking a proof that the gate has been opened, and that it still stands open to you. O, take the lesson to heart! For when can you lack comfort and hope if you know and believe that your prayer contains its own answer, that your desire implies its own satisfaction, that you would never have asked for the best things if God had not moved you to ask for them, and did not mean to give them?

For, finally, in this proof that you were heard before you asked, and answered before you spoke, there lies a pledge that you shall be still more abundantly blessed. The desires for wisdom and righteousness, for a lowly,

pure, and kindly heart, which you pour out before God in your prayers, are cherished, fed, strengthened by being expressed in his Presence. The wish takes on the consecration of a vow. The vow impels you to a more constant and importunate search, or endeavour to possess yourselves of the good things you ask for. You are not content with simple asking ; you seek for them : and not content even with seeking, you knock as those in utmost need, who will not be denied. And this is precisely the attitude of the soul to which all things are possible, all things granted. The man who seeks wealth finds it, if only he seek earnestly enough and subordinate all other aims to this. The man who seeks knowledge finds it, if only he seek earnestly enough and will not be diverted from his quest. And shall not the man who seeks goodness find it, if only he seek earnestly enough, and will be content with nothing short of it ?

The best things are open to every man, even the best of all, the Spirit of all goodness. God is not the poorer for giving it, but the richer : why, then, should He not bestow it on as many as ask ? God is your Father. Must He not desire that his children should be of one spirit with Him even more earnestly than they desire it ?

“ Ask, then, and it *shall* be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For *everyone* that asketh receiveth ; everyone that seeketh findeth : to everyone that knocketh it is opened.”

VI.

WISDOM, WHENCE SHALL SHE BE GOTTEN?

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.”—
JAMES i. 5.

WHAT is that which is most inseparable from a man, and of the greatest worth to him *while he lives*? Surely it is himself, his personality, his character such as he has made it. What is that, again, which alone a man can take with him *when he dies*, and the quality of which must shape his future destiny? Surely it is himself, his personality, his character such as he has made it. That, then, which is of supreme importance to us, that which endures through all the changes and decays of nature, that which really determines our fate in life, in death, and after death, is the character which has been framed and developed in us during these fleeting hours of time, and by all the chances and changes of this mutable world. *This* is, and will be, our sole, our real, possession, the single fountain from which our bliss or our

misery flows, for ever. So that our highest wisdom, the one true secret of life, is self-training, self-culture, the development of a complete and noble character.

The point is so important, and so much depends upon it, that I must ask you to dwell on it a little, to turn it round and round in your thoughts, in order that you may see it on all sides, in order that you may assure and persuade yourselves of its truth.

Character, I say, the formation of a noble and complete character, is the secret and wisdom *of life*; and you are to consider whether or not that be true. What, then, are the things in which you take the gravest interest, which most engage your time, your thoughts, your heart, your activities? Business and its gains, shall we say? and home and its pleasures. You go forth to labour in the morning, and in the evening you return to your homes. You want your business to prosper; you want your homes to be pleasant. But does not much of your success in business, if not all, depend on your character, *i.e.*, your energy, your knowledge, your tact, your integrity? And does not nearly all the pleasure you take in your success, whether that success be less or more, depend on your character? Look around you. You see men whose business grows larger and more profitable year by year. They are rich and increased in goods; they have all that heart could wish. Are they, necessarily, happy in their gains? If

they are of a base and selfish, a grasping and an envious spirit, or if they are of a peevish, fretful, and discontented spirit, are they not most miserable, however rapidly their gains accumulate? On the other hand, do you not know men who, though they are far from wealthy, are nevertheless of so manly, cheerful, and hopeful a temper that it is a pleasure to meet them? so bright that they shed a brightness on the day? so brave and manful that they inspire you with new courage and hope? And of these last do you not feel that they are equal to any fortune, and would conquer in almost any strife with adversity by force of sheer resolution and an invincible hopefulness of heart? If the choice were offered you, "Take mere wealth, or take this strong, bold, manly temperament," which would you prefer if you were wise? Not the wealth, I am sure, but the fine temper which can either enjoy wealth or dispense with it.

Nor is character of less value in the home, with its charities and pleasures, than in business, and its gains or losses. A sweet and noble character goes far to make a happy home even in the unhappiest conditions. Most of us, I suppose, have known men, not at all singularly blessed in wife, children, or conditions, who have nevertheless contrived to shed an atmosphere of health, and peace, and gaiety around them, who have somehow infected even a peevish wife, or an ill-condi-

tioned child, with their own good nature, and have made even a poor home the abode of love and cheerful goodwill. And, on the other hand, have we not all known men with sumptuous abodes, loving wives, obedient kindly-natured children, who came into their homes like an east wind, or a nipping frost, and wrought as unkindly and inauspicious a change?

Far more, then, than on outward conditions, the welfare and happiness of life depend on character. He whose character is well-balanced and well-developed, who is not only manly, but a mature and complete man, is equal to any conditions, and rises superior to them all.

So again, and still more obviously, *in death* character is of supreme importance. We often say, "It is very certain that as we brought nothing into the world, so also we can carry nothing out." And, in a sense, the saying is pathetically true. We *must* leave all behind. We cannot take our factories, homes, gains, books, or even our dearest friends, with us. A great gulf suddenly yawns between us and all whom we have loved; and we have to go on our way and leave them weeping on the other side, vainly straining their eyes toward the darkness which hides us from them. In this sense, the common saying is obviously and pathetically true. But, in a deeper sense, it is as obviously untrue. *Is* it "very certain that we brought nothing into the world" with us—no hereditary bias, no predispositions, no special apti-

tudes, no defects of will or taints of blood? Surely not. Nor is it by any means certain that we shall "take nothing out" of the world. We shall take *much*—nothing visible and external indeed, but how much that is inward and spiritual! We shall take the character we have built up, the bias we have developed, the habits we have formed. We shall take the love and the prayers of our friends, if we have been happy enough to win their love. Our works will go with us, and follow after us, the kind deeds we have done, and, alas, the unkind also. Like the Prophet's roll, our whole soul will be written within and without with signs which God will read, and from which He will read off our sentence. All that strange complex of natural temperament, hereditary gifts, and acquired habits, which we call *character*, the result of a myriad various influences—all this will go with us, and in us, when we arise to follow the summons of Death. And, beyond a doubt, then as now, there as here, the ruling bent of our character will determine our fate.

Are you convinced, my brethren? Do you admit that, in life and in death, character is of vital and supreme importance? that "it matters not how long we live, but *how*"? that what happens to us is a very small thing as compared with how we take it? If you are, you will acknowledge that your main task in the world is the formation of character; that it is your

highest wisdom to endeavour after a character which shall be noble and complete, a character which will fit you both to live and to die. All else is of no worth compared with this. All else is of no worth save as it contributes to this.

But, though this be our highest wisdom, is it within our reach? Let us ask St. James. In writing to the Christian Jews who were exiles in foreign lands, he commences his Letter by wishing them "joy."¹ But as their outward conditions were most miserable, as men of their blood were hated, and plundered, and persecuted far more bitterly then than they are now, he felt that his wish, his salutation, "Joy to you," would grate on their hearts unless he could teach them, by a certain divine alchemy, to extract joy from their very miseries. This divine art, therefore, he at once proceeds to teach them in the verses which immediately precede my text. They were to "count it *all* joy," *pure* joy, *nothing but* joy, when they were exercised with divers trials and tribulations, when their outward conditions grew hard, painful, threatening: for these trials came to test their faith in God; and this testing was designed *by God*, whatever man might mean by it, to breed in them sted-

¹ "Joy to you" was the common Greek salutation, as "peace to you" was the common Hebrew salutation. And the Epistle of St. James opens with this Greek salutation as the margin of our Revised Version indicates. For, while the text retains the word "greeting," the margin more literally renders "wisheth joy."

fastness, courage, a resolute constancy of spirit. If they suffered trial to train and develop this constancy, this patient fidelity, if, *i.e.*, they suffered trial to produce its due and proper effect upon them, they would become mature and complete men, lacking nothing. In other words, this patient and faithful endurance, which God sent and intended adversity to produce, would gradually work out in them that manly and noble character which, as we have seen, is our highest good, since it fits us both to live and to die ; a good, therefore, which it is our highest wisdom to seek.

This, then, is the point I want you to mark—that our argument is confirmed by St. James. He, too, holds the right formation of character to be the sum of human wisdom. “Trials,” he says—and by “trials” he means such familiar adversities as pain, loss, the hatred and contempt of the world, and the fear and grief which they breed in us—“if they be bravely met, search out and carry away faults and defects of character, as the acid bites out the alloy from the gold. They make, or tend to make, us of so complete and entire a manliness that nothing is lacking to us.” And, here, he seems to pause and reflect for a moment. “Nothing lacking ! Ah, but those to whom I write may lack *wisdom to see* that the endeavour to become complete and mature men in Christ Jesus *is* the truest and highest wisdom, an aim so high and precious that, to reach it, they should count

the world, and all that the world has to offer, well lost." And, therefore, he adds : " If any of you lack wisdom," *i.e.*, if any of you lack *this* wisdom, the wisdom which holds the hope of becoming perfect in character above all other aims, let him ask it of God, and it shall be given him."

So that, according to James, the brother of our Lord, the supreme good of life, the character which fits us both to live and to die, *is* within our reach. Many of us, no doubt, do lack the wisdom to make the attainment of this perfect manliness our supreme aim : for when St. James says, "*If* any man lack this wisdom," he does not mean to imply a doubt that we lack it. He knows that men do lack it, some being wholly without it, and others having it only in part. His word "if" is equivalent to our word "whenever," and what he means is that so soon, and so often, as we become conscious of this lack, we may take it to God and have it supplied.

As interpreting St. James to your moral and spiritual conditions, therefore, I have, first, to warn you that you do lack the wisdom which lacks nothing ; that you do *not* keep the hope of becoming perfect men in Christ Jesus constantly before you ; that you are not content to endure any trial, however bitter and deep, in order that you may become perfect : and that still less can you account these keen and piercing tests pure joy and nothing but joy. But, happily, I have also to assure

you that the wisdom, which seems beyond your reach, is nevertheless within your reach ; that if you ask it of God, it shall be given you. *He* will teach and help you to put a pure and noble character before the happiest outward conditions. He will help you to welcome the trials by which He is seeking to make you steadfast, to brace you to a mature and complete manliness, to supply what is lacking in you until you lack nothing. He touches you here, and touches you there, with his tests, commonly searching out your tenderest and weakest points, seeming at times to wrap your whole nature in the fiery acid ; but his design, his purpose, is that you may become pure gold throughout : his will is your perfection.

If you cannot *see* that to be his purpose, ask Him to shew it to you, and He will shew it. If you are saying within yourselves, "I cannot see anything in the trial that is wearing me out and exhausting my powers which is at all likely to make me any better," obviously you lack wisdom. You can see neither the good end God has in view for you, nor how it is to be accomplished. "If any man lack this wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given him." You may be sure that the good God *has* a good end in all He does, even though you cannot see it. But if you want to see it, if it be necessary to your welfare and peace that you should see it, ask Him to shew it to you. St. James did not

hesitate to say, "*It shall be given you :*" why should I scruple to repeat it? Nor is it only St. James's voice that we hear in this gracious promise. His words are here, what they often are elsewhere, simply an echo of the words of Him to whom God has given all authority in heaven and on earth. "Ask, and it shall be given you," says James; but in the Sermon on the Mount a greater than he said, "*Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you : for every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*" In short, it is no one less than the Lord from heaven who assures us that, whether we lack wisdom to *make* God's will our will, or wisdom to *see* the wisdom of his will, we have but to ask, and our lack of wisdom shall be supplied.

Let me put a case. Let me suppose that you are growing impatient, or despondent, under the pressure of some heavy and protracted trial, the kindly purpose of which you do not see. And you ask God to give you wisdom that you may both see and believe in the kind end for which He sent it. Is it likely, is it reasonable, to expect that He will answer your prayer? Surely it is most likely, most reasonable. If you talk with men, indeed, your pride and obstinacy may be roused. In reply to all they urge you may say, "Still, I don't see that any good comes, or can come, from this

misery, and nothing shall ever persuade me that good will come of it." But if you speak with God, you cannot for very reverence take the tone which you might take with one no wiser than yourself. If you ask *Him* for wisdom to see his purpose in afflicting you, you will *try* to see it. You will admit that God may be right, and you wrong. You may even come to feel that He *must* be right, though you are too weak and ignorant to see what He is doing with you. And, then, He who can lay his finger on all the springs of thought and emotion within us, may, and will, touch your hearts in the right place. Coming to Him in the attitude of humble and sincere prayer, bringing an open mind to the influence of his truth and grace, He will be able to reveal his will and purpose to you, and you will learn that it is in love and compassion, not in anger, that He has afflicted you.

Let me put another case. Let me suppose that you do not yet see Character to be far more valuable than happy outward conditions, that you have not learned to make it your supreme aim to become mature and complete men in Christ Jesus; and yet you are not satisfied with the aims you *have* set before you. You find that, even when you reach them, you cannot rest in them. You begin to suspect that you lack wisdom to choose your own way and your own aims, that you have not discovered the supreme good, having which

you can be content whatever else you lack. If that be your position, and you ask wisdom of God, the wisdom to see what your supreme good is and where it lies, is it reasonable to believe that He will give it you? Again, it *is* reasonable, most reasonable. For, as you pray, you grow sincere. You can see more clearly what your life has been given you for, for what high and noble ends. You endeavour to break through the clouds which hide the chief end of man from you, and to break away from the cravings and distractions which divert you from pursuing it. In short you reach the position, and take the attitude, in which you are most likely, as all experience proves, to find wisdom. You so relate yourself to the Father of lights that He is able to shed light into your soul.

And if He is able, can you doubt that He is willing? What is the sun full of light for but that it may shine? And what is God good for but that He may shew Himself good, that He may impart his goodness. The sun may shine on cold hard surfaces that simply throw off its light; but where it *can* penetrate and fructify, it does. And God may shew his love and grace to hearts that cannot or will not receive them; but where He finds an open and prepared, a seeking and receptive, heart, He enters in, and enters to make it wise and good.

If you want testimony to his goodness from one who has experienced it, listen to St. James. As he bids you

ask of God the wisdom you lack, he encourages you to ask it by describing God as "the Giver," the universal Giver, as giving to *all* men. God goes on giving, just as the sun goes on shining, on the evil and on the good, on the just and on the unjust. The difference between men is not that God refuses any of them any one of the gifts necessary to their welfare and salvation, but that some receive and profit by them, while others reject them or abuse them to their own hurt. If, then, you honestly crave wisdom to make his will your will, to aim at that maturity and perfection of character which He knows to be your supreme good, He will as surely give you that wisdom as the sweet, pure, sun-warmed air will flow into your room when you throw open your window to the day.

You need have no fear that God will palter with you in a double sense, that He will keep his word of promise to the ear, but break it to the hope it has inspired. For He giveth "with liberality," or "with *simplicity*," with singleness of spirit, and without reserve. *He* is not "of two minds," as men often are. He does not, as men often do, give, and yet in effect not give. Nor does He give, and yet by an ungracious manner, or by subsequent ungenerous exactions, spoil and neutralize his gifts, and make you wish you had not accepted them. His gifts are without duplicity, even as they are without repentance. He has no bye-ends to serve, no self-regarding

motive. He does not give that He may get. He gives, simply because He is "the Giver," because He loves giving, because He loves *you* and seeks your welfare.

Nor need you fear to ask of Him either because you have so often asked before, or because you have never asked before. For He "*upbraideth* not." He will not reproach you with his former mercies, or with your former indifference to them. All He asks is that you will ask of Him. It is his good pleasure to give you pleasure and to do you good. He is of a perfect wisdom, and longs to make you wise. You can do Him no greater kindness than to ask, receive, and use the gifts He has to bestow. If, then, any of you lack wisdom, wisdom to count it all joy that you are being made perfect and complete men by the divers trials which put your character to the test, and put it to the test that they may raise and refine it, ask that wisdom of God who giveth liberally to all men, and *upbraideth* not, and it shall be given you.

And, in especial, I would urge those of you who are *now* being tried, and tried, as you sometimes fear, beyond your strength, to ask wisdom of the great Giver of wisdom. From whatever cause your anxieties and griefs may spring, whether they spring from broken health, from the threatening aspect of your business affairs, or from trouble in the home, whether they spring from your own follies and sins or from the sins and

follies of your neighbours, God intends them for your good, for the discipline and growth of character ; intends them to spur and brace you to fortitude, courage, patience ; and therefore He would have you count them all joy, since they will bring you joy at the last if you meet them with a constant spirit. But *how* can you meet them in such a spirit unless you believe that He intends them for your good ?

Whether your trials will do you good or harm depends on the way in which you adjust yourselves to them, on how you take them ; and this, again, depends on the leading aim you set before you. If you only care, or care mainly, to "get on," to amass a fortune, or to take your ease, your losses and disappointments, your crosses and cares, will only sadden and distress you. But if your chief aim is to become good men, mature and perfect men, created anew after the pattern and image of Christ Jesus, you will try to get some good, some training in goodness, from your very cares and sorrows. Under their pressure you will endeavour more earnestly than ever to acquire that equal mind which takes Fortune's buffets and rewards with composure, that firm and habitual trust in God and in his gracious intentions toward you which is your only adequate support amid the chances and changes of time. Above all men you admire those who are of a brave and constant spirit, who will not be a pipe in Fortune's fingers and let her

play what step she please, who will not be daunted by her frowns or carried away by her smiles. And can you complain that God is seeking to make you the sort of man you most admire, as independent of all outward advantages or disadvantages as our Lord Himself, as resolutely bent on making God's will your will, and rising into the mature and perfect manliness which is his aim for you and should be your chief aim for yourselves? If you care most for Character, the trials that brace, refine, and elevate your character should not be unwelcome to you. And if as yet you lack the wisdom which sees in every trial a discipline of character and perfection, ask this wisdom of God the Giver, and it shall be given you.

And do not be daunted, do not infer that God has forgotten to be gracious, if you do not receive, or think you do not receive, an immediate answer to your prayer. Our prayers themselves are often God's best answers to our prayers, as even men unguided by the Christian Faith, but not untaught of God, have discovered. Thus, for instance, an old Persian poet (of the thirteenth century), speaking of an austere Islamite saint, says :

That just person was crying, "O Allah !"
That his mouth might be sweetened thereby.
And Satan said to him, "Be quiet, O austere one,
How long wilt thou babble, O man of many words?
No answer comes to thee from nigh the throne :
How long wilt thou cry 'Allah' with harsh face?"

That person was sad at heart, and hung his head,
And then beheld the prophet Khizr before him in a vision,
Who said to him, "Ah, thou hast ceased to call on God ;
Wherefore repentest thou of calling on Him?"
The man said, "The answer, ' Here am I,' came not,
Wherefore I fear that I am repulsed from the door."
Khizr replied to him, "God has given me this command :
Go to him and say, O much-tried one,
Did not I engage thee to do me service?
Did I not engage thee to call on me?
That calling 'Allah' of thine *was* my ' Here am I,'
And that pain and longing and ardour of thine my messenger ;
Thy struggles and strivings for assistance
Were my attractings and originated thy prayer.
Thy fear and thy love are the covert of my mercy,
Each 'O Lord' of thine contains in any a ' Here am I.'"¹

Be of good courage, then, and strengthen thy heart ;
and wait thou on the Lord. Wait, I say, on the Lord.

¹ *Masnawi* of Jalá-'d dín A.D. 1207-1273.

VII.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMANDMENTS.

"Then one of them, a lawyer, put a question to test him : Master, what is the best commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God in the whole of thy heart, and in the whole of thy soul, and in the whole of thy mind. This is the best and first commandment. But there is a second like it ; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. In these two commandments the whole law hangs, and the prophets."—MATTHEW xxii. 35-40.

WHEN you go into a Church, you often see two tablets on the Eastern wall, on one of which is inscribed "The Belief," and on the other, "The Commandments." The Belief consists of what is called "The Apostles' Creed," though the Apostles had nothing to do with it, which begins, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;" and the Commandments are "the ten words," or precepts, given by Moses. Now, personally, you may have no difficulty in reciting "the Apostles' Creed," or even that forged and mistranslated clause which affirms that Christ "descended into *hell*." To you, as to me, it may be, when rightly rendered and

understood, a short and simple summary of the facts of Christ's life, and of the doctrines which are most heartily believed among us. But, simple and beautiful as it is, we have no right to impose even this Creed on the consciences of men, or to affirm that, unless they assent to it, they cannot be saved. We may believe every word of it ourselves ; but we have no right to make our creed a public standard of faith, and to condemn as many as reject it. The *Lord's* creed, the creed which St. Paul received from Him, and taught in all the churches, is far simpler than "the Apostles' creed." It is written in 1 Corinthians xv. 3, 4, and all that it demands of us is that we should say from the heart, "I believe that Christ both died for our sins, and rose again, according to the Scriptures," *i.e.*, according to the will of God. And, therefore, the Apostles' Creed, since it goes beyond that of Christ Himself, has a very questionable claim to its place on the walls of the Church.

And what possible claim have the *Hebrew* commandments to a place of honour and authority in the Christian Church? One of them, at least, the law of the *Hebrew* sabbath, has been expressly repudiated by St. Paul, and has been silently renounced by all who profess and call themselves Christians. Most of the other commandments have been adopted into the law of the land, so that to keep them is no longer a distinctively Christian

confession. A man is not a Christian because he does no murder and commits no adultery, because he neither steals nor covets his neighbour's goods, because he makes or worships no graven images, or even because he honours his father and his mother. And still less is he a Christian if he discharges these plain duties from the self-regarding Hebrew motives, that it may be well with him and that his days may be long in the land. Christ has brought in a new and more spiritual morality ; a morality of principles, not of rules ; a morality which is not imposed upon us from without, but which works from within ; a morality which stands a whole heaven above that of the Jews. Their morality is only his ritualism (James i. 27).

And if we had the spirit of Christ, if we were bent on drawing all men into his Church and on making the Church a true brotherhood, we should carefully discharge from our standards of faith and duty all that is not distinctively Christian, while at the same time we took pains to include in them whatever is essential to the Christian faith and life. We should make our Creed as simple, and as short, as we could, that it might find the wider acceptance. We should state the Christian duties as simply, and as briefly, as we could, that no man who feared God and wrought righteousness, might be alienated from us. Whereas, as things go, it would almost seem that those who organized our existing Churches

had so little of his spirit that they set themselves, not to try how many they could bring in, but how many they could shut out. Acknowledging Christ to be the only source of authority in the Church, it looks as if they would rather go to any one than to Him for an authoritative statement of what men are to believe and to do. When they want a Creed, they go—where? To Christ, and to the Apostles who had most of his spirit? Nay, but to the fathers of the Greek Church, or to the hair-splitting casuists of the middle ages. They do not go far enough back for their creed. And when they want a Code, where do they go? To Christ Himself, or to his Apostles? No; for this they go too far back, right past Christ to Moses, as he stands trembling on the trembling Mount. It looks as though, learn of whom else they would, they would not learn of Him whom they call Master and Lord.

And yet, if only we will take a creed and a law from his mouth, there is no difficulty in finding them. Mark how simple and plain the case is with the Christian Creed. Christ Himself habitually demanded that men should believe on Him. With one voice his Apostles demanded of every inquiring soul, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But to believe in *Jesus*, is to believe in the Saviour from sin; for "Jesus" means "Saviour." To believe in *Christ* is to believe that He was anointed, or ordained, to save, by

God the Father ; for "Christ" means "anointed." To believe in Him as *the Lord* is to believe that God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself ; for "Lord" means "God." Nay, as I have just reminded you, in his Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul gives us a formal creed which he not only affirms to have been the creed of all the Apostolic Churches, but which he expressly declares that he "received" directly and immediately from the Lord Himself : and this Creed is, "That Christ died for our sins, and that he rose again, according to the Scriptures," *i.e.*, according to the will of God which the Scriptures reveal.¹ So that the Lord Himself, through the Apostle Paul, offers us a Creed, *the* Creed of the Christian Church, if only we care to receive it.

Nor is the case any less plain with respect to the Christian Commandments : it is even more plain. In my text, than which no words of Christ are more familiar, He give us *his* reading of the Law ; He tells us what He held to be essential in it. First of all, He reduces the ten commandments to two ; then He makes a disinterested love the motive of both, instead of self-interest, which was the Jewish motive : and, finally, He deliberately affirms, with the full sanction of the Hebrew

¹ Compare with this Creed St. Paul's definition of his gospel in Romans x. 8, 9 : "The word of faith which we preach is that if thou shalt *confess* with thy mouth *the Lord Jesus*, and shalt believe in thy heart *that God raised him from the dead*, thou shalt be saved."

lawyers and scribes moreover, that within the sphere of this love to God and man the whole law hangs and swings, and not the law only, but also the prophetic expositions and expansions of the law.

Here, then, we have the simple Creed delivered to his servants by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the succinct and spiritual Code to which He reduced the tangled and cumbrous enactments of the Hebrew law. And if any of you should ever build a Church, retain the tablets on the wall if you will ; but let the Belief inscribed on them be : " I believe that Christ died for our sins, and rose again, according to the will of God ; " and let the Commandments be : " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind ; " and, " Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself : " for then you will have the creed of *Christ*, and the commandments of *Christ*, set forth as the standards of faith and duty in the House dedicated to his service and called by his name.

But, now, let us look at these Commandments a little more closely, and inquire what they mean.

This divine summary of the Divine Law was uttered by Christ in answer to a question. The question was asked of Him by a lawyer, *i.e.*, a man whose life was devoted to the study and exposition of the law as given by Moses, this law being, remember, the law of the land, the public legal code of the Hebrew race. So that the

lawyer was a kind of Biblical solicitor, just as the scribe was "a writer" in the Scotch sense. Men consulted him as to whether this or that action were legal and allowed. They brought him cases of conscience and difficult problems of interpretation, consulting him on their duties and their rights, just as any one of us might go to a solicitor and ask him whether or not the statutes of the realm would bear us out in this course of procedure or that, or gave us a remedy for this or that wrong. Even in his unprofessional hours and moods the Hebrew lawyer was not averse "to moot points," and to pose less learned persons than himself with questions they might find it hard to answer. This lawyer thought that he would pose Jesus who, though trained in no school of learning, had just answered the questions of the Herodians and Sadducees so wisely as to astonish all who heard Him. And so he asks Him, "Rabbi, which is the great commandment of the law?" But here our English very imperfectly renders the Greek. The word rendered "which" means far more than "which." What the lawyer really asked was, "*Of what sort*, or kind, what is the quality, character, distinction, of that commandment which you consider to be the greatest?" Or, to put the puzzle more simply and broadly, "Which do you hold to be *the best* commandment in the Bible?" And when he had put his question, I dare say the lawyer drew himself up, and nodded shrewdly at his com-

panions, as who should say, "Let him answer *that* if he can!"

But Jesus can answer the question, and does answer it, without delay. "The best commandment," He says, "the commandment of widest reach and finest quality, is this: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God in the whole of thy heart, and in the whole of thy soul, and in the whole of thy mind." The smile of expected triumph fades from the lawyer's lips as he listens. He has met his match, and far more than his match; for the Lord Jesus, giving him even more than he had asked, continues: "But a second is like unto it;" *i.e.*, "there is another commandment of the same fine quality, the same penetrating force, the same broad scope; and it is this: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Now this was the true answer, the full and complete answer, to the question, as the lawyer could not deny. For his catch was a common one in that day, and the answer of Jesus was the recognized solution of it. Long before this moment, another lawyer, when asked by Christ, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" had replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke x. 25-27). So that our Lord's answer, *his* solution of the problem, was not original; it was the common and accepted answer among the

students and masters of the law—as, indeed, this master confesses in the words, “Of a truth, Teacher, thou hast well said” (Mark xii. 32, 33).

The only wonder to those who heard it from Christ’s lips was how *He* came to know it, He who had “never learned,” never sat at the feet of any of their rabbis, never passed through any of their schools. It was a lawyer’s puzzle ; and as He was not a lawyer, they expected Him to be posed by it. An ordinary layman would have been posed by it. For neither “the first and great commandment,” nor “the second, which is like unto it,” was contained in the Decalogue, though obedience to them was far “more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.” The first, that which enjoins love to God, is only given, incidentally, in a summary of human duty contained in Deuteronomy (Chap. vi. 5 ; and again, Chap. x. 12). The second, that which enjoins love for our neighbour, is hidden away among a crowd of Levitical enactments of the most minute and burdensome kind,—enactments as to how corn was to be reaped and grapes gathered, on the consideration to be shewn for the deaf and the blind, on not sowing different kinds of seed in the same field, and not weaving linen and woollen yarns into the same garment (Leviticus xix. 18). It took some knowledge of the law, therefore, to find these two commandments at all, and much knowledge of it, and much spiritual insight, to discern that they were the first and best command-

ments. Had the question been put to most Jews, or perhaps even to any of our Lord's disciples, they would in all probability have run over the familiar ten commandments in their minds, and have asked themselves, "Is it this, or this?" and no doubt the vast majority of them would have settled on that which stands first on the roll, and replied, "*This* is the first and great commandment, Hear, O Israel, thou shalt have no other gods before me." It was only the lawyers who would have answered the question as Jesus answered it.

But though they would have used his words, would they have used them in the same sense? They *would* have selected the same two commandments for special honour; we know that they did select them: but would they have seen in them the meaning that He saw? We know that they would not, that they did not. To them, this answer was only the right answer to a legal catch; to Him, it was the supreme fact of human life. For what else had He come into the world but just this?—To induce men, by revealing God's hearty love for them all, to love Him with all their hearts and their neighbours as themselves. *In* these two commandments, He affirms, hung the whole law and the prophets; that is to say, "This love for God and man is as a vast orbit, or sphere, within whose ample curve the whole moral law swings, and moves, and holds its course. He whose thoughts, affections, will, life, are dominated by love has, in this

love, that which includes all that the law of Moses was given to enjoin, and all that the prophets were sent to teach. Within the orbit of love the whole world of duty has ample verge. He who has this, has all."

This, in brief, was what *Christ* meant by his answer to the question. But though the lawyers gave precisely the same answer to it, was this what *they* meant by the answer? It was at the farthest remove from what they meant by it, as their lives proved, and the occupation on which they wasted their lives. They gave themselves to "fencing," to interpreting, applying, and guarding the cumbrous system of enactments by which Moses had separated the Jews from other races, and that in the most formal, technical, and exclusive spirit. They were zealous for tradition. They overlaid the commandments with a mass of pedantic details which grew into a burden too heavy to be borne by any living conscience. They sank into casuists. They sacrificed morality to religion. Their conscience ran to leaf instead of fruit. Instead of putting love first, they simply make it impossible: for how could a man love the God who was for ever tormenting him with minute rigorous requirements which made his life a burden to him? or how could he secure a heart at leisure from itself with which he might love his neighbour?

Obviously, then, although the lawyers answered the question, "Which is the best commandment?" as Jesus

answered it, they used the same words in a wholly different sense. *They* were puzzling out a legal riddle ; *He* was enunciating the supreme law of human life, the law by which He ruled his own life and would have us rule ours.

And is it not, in very deed, the true and supreme law ? Are not these two Commandments of the finest quality, of the most subtle spiritual temper, of the amplest scope ? Surely it is reasonable that we should love God, our Maker, Father, Redeemer. Surely it is reasonable that, if we love Him at all, we should love Him with the whole of our nature, and not only with a part of it, in the whole of our heart, and of our soul, and of our mind. And if it be reasonable to love Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being, it is also reasonable that we should love one another, since He quickened and sustains us all. "What do we live for, if it be not to make life less difficult to each other ?" It is hard enough of itself ; we need not make it harder. Do we not, each of us, crave love for himself ? and can we hope to receive, save as we give, it ? Nay, do we not, each one of us, crave *to love*, even more than *to be loved* ? Is it not even more necessary for our wellbeing and happiness that we should be saved from selfishness by having the fountain of love unsealed within us than that, still remaining selfish, we should drink of the pure stream which flows from a neighbour's heart ?

If any man ask, "Why does Christ lay so much stress on *a mere sentiment*, or emotion?" the answer is clear and plain. Our whole life is ruled by sentiment; in all we do we are prompted by some passion or emotion. What is it that takes you to your daily tasks, and makes you diligent in discharging them? It is your love of gain, or of a good reputation; or it is a passionate desire to get on in the world, to rise, to win the respect of men; or it is a sense of duty energized by love for your wife and children, your wish to provide for them and to give them all they require. Sentiment, emotion, passion, is the motive-force, the driving-force, of human life; and therefore Christ lays so much emphasis upon it, and urges us, as our first duty, to get the mainspring of passion right.

If any man—a little weary of the modern cant about charity—should ask, "Why does Christ lay so much stress on *love*? why does He declare the commandments which enjoin love of God and man to be the two commandments which include all others?" again the answer is plain and clear. Selfishness is the root and essence of all sin; and love is the one passion that can conquer selfishness. When we do what our conscience condemns, it is because we seek thereby to advance our own interests, or supposed interests, or because we want to seize what we take for pleasure. We set up our own will against another and a higher Will. That is to say, in the

last resort, sin is always selfishness, the selfishness which defeats itself. Whenever we do wrong, we are making self our centre—self-interest, self-gratification, self-love. This base passion is natural to us, or natural to that which is base in us ; and, being natural, it is strong. The one passion that always masters it, that masters it for a time even in the basest and most grasping natures, is love. It is of the very essence of love that it is unselfish, that it prefers the welfare, the gain, or the pleasure, of another to its own.

Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a heaven in hell's despair.

It is only lust, that base and sensual counterfeit of love, which—

seeketh *only* self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a hell in heaven's despite.

And hence it is that Christ lays so much stress on love, the true master-passion of the soul. As selfishness is the root of all sin, so love is the root of all nobleness and virtue. Christ came to shift the centre of gravity in the human soul, to move and raise it from selfishness to love. Because He came to save us from our sins, He bids us love—love God and man—with a pure and undivided affection. Within this golden sphere, He affirms, the

whole law to be hung, so that he who possesses himself of love possesses himself of that which includes the whole duty of man.

But *how* are we to be won to this pure and disinterested affection? No common inducement will suffice. Nor is it a common inducement that is offered us. In the person of Christ God Himself became man, lived our life, bore our sorrows, died our death, took away our sins, and went up on high to shed down his pure and loving spirit on us, and to prepare a place for us, that where He is there we may be also. And all this He did to shew how far He would go, how much He would do, to redeem us from our miseries, and from the sins from which our misery springs.

Now if that be true, *as it is*, have we not abundant cause to cherish a love for God the domain of which shall include our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind? Can we go too far, or do too much, for Him? And if *He* loved men even more than He loved Himself, ought not *we* to love them at least as much as we love ourselves? Must we not, if our love for Him be sincere? How can we love Him with an utter and unselfish devotion, and not love those who are so dear to Him, who have never wronged us as they have wronged Him, and whose faults cannot be so offensive to us as they are to Him?

Why do we not love them? Because they do not

please us ; because they offend us ; perchance because they wrong, or even because they weary, us. That is to say, we are still thinking of *ourselves*. Self colours all our thoughts of our neighbours, and all the emotions we cherish toward them. Love has not yet conquered selfishness in us. We are still in our sins, still in that selfishness from which all sin springs. The very moment we consciously cherish a repugnance to any man, or cease to fight against it, we may know that our love of God is not perfect. See how those in whom love is nearest to perfection and self most dead, in their round of service and devotion, go among the most vicious and depraved, the most loathsome and neglected of their neighbours. See how men and women of the most refined culture and habits will preside over the casual ward of a workhouse, or sponge the sores of hospital patients, or grope for the wounded amid the smoke and darkness of the battlefield. Nay, remember how Christ Himself went about doing good among the lame, the blind, the paralyzed, the leprous, laying his hands upon them at times with a tender caressing love, meeting them always with a love that was warm, and cordial, and sympathetic.

When you would know how you should love God, what is meant by loving Him with all your heart and soul and mind, remember how Christ loved Him, so loved Him that He did not count his life dear if only He might do the will of his Father. When you would

know how you should love your neighbour, and what is meant by loving him as yourself, do not listen to theologians and moralists, with their fine-spun distinctions between "the love of complacency" and "the love of benevolence," but remember Christ; remember that you have seen Him caressing a little child, leading a blind man by the hand, becoming a leper by touching a leper; remember that you have heard Him accost a stranger as a friend, and bless the harlot who wept at his feet, and sit at meat with publicans and sinners who had been driven out of the Synagogue with stripes. And let the love that wrought in Him be in you, and work in you as it wrought in Him, so that you too shall not count your lives dear unto you in the service of God, and shall see in every man, however degraded or offensive, a brother and a friend.

VIII.

THE GOSPEL OF RETRIBUTION.

“And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to proclaim to them that dwell on the earth, and unto every nation and tribe and tongue and people ; and he saith with a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory ; for the hour of his judgment is come : and worship him that made the heaven and the earth, and sea and fountains of waters.”—REVELATION xiv. 6, 7.

ST. JOHN was not a prophet in the ancient and the vulgar sense ; he was not a mere seer of coming events, a mere student and interpreter of the shadows they cast before them ; but a wise and holy man who had a keen and trained insight into the moral laws by which God governs the world, and so heartily believed in these laws as to be quite sure that in the ethical, as in the physical, world effects spring from causes and correspond to them, that actions are invariably followed by their due consequences and rewards. And, hence, the Apocalypse of St. John is not a series of forecasts, predicting the political weather of the world through the ages of history ; it is rather a series of symbols and visions in which the universal principles of the Divine Rule are

set forth in forms dear to the heart of a Hebrew mystic and poet.

What is most valuable to us in this Book, therefore, is not the letter, the form, not the vials, the seals, the trumpets, over which interpreters, who play the seer rather than the prophet, have been wrangling and perplexing their brains for centuries, but the large general principles which these mystic symbols of Oriental thought are apt to conceal from a Western mind. Whether or not, for example, this vision of an angel flying through heaven to proclaim an impending judgment was taken by St. John's first readers to indicate an approaching event of world-wide moment, is a question of comparatively slight importance to us; it is, indeed, mainly a question of curious antiquarian interest. But that a Divine judgment impends over all the actions and generations of men; that the hour of judgment is sure to strike at the due moment, let men play what tricks they will with the hands of the clock, and sure to be heard over all the world, let men close their ears as they will: that this fact of impending and inevitable judgment is an eternal, or æonial, *Gospel*, veritable good tidings of great joy to every nation and tribe, tongue and people—all this is at once of supreme importance and supreme interest. A gospel for all men, in all ages, must be a gospel for us. A gospel weighted by no miracles and no dogmas; a gospel which is open

to no question and no doubt, but is felt to be true always, and everywhere, and by all ; a gospel which science and experience and conscience proclaim as earnestly as any other angels, or messengers and ministers, of God ; a gospel which throws an interpreting, reconciling, and healing light on the darkest sorrows and deepest wounds of the human heart, must surely be the very gospel which many stricken and wandering souls are now seeking, and to which even the most worldly and indifferent must listen not with interest alone, but with lively curiosity and some faint stirrings of expectation and hope.

I. What, then, is this Gospel ? It is *the gospel of retribution* ; we are to fear and glorify God *because the hour of his judgment is come*. This is the truth which the angel flying in mid-heaven, between God and man, proclaims to-day, and always has proclaimed, and always will proclaim. This is the truth which St. John calls “an eternal gospel”—not *the* gospel, and still less the only gospel, but still a veritable gospel, glad tidings of great joy, to us and to all mankind.

Are you disappointed ? Do you say : “That is true enough, no doubt. Sooner or later the actions of men do round upon them in the strangest way. A man may as soon jump off his own shadow as evade the consequences of his own deeds. His sins find him out, let him hide himself where he will, and though he run to

the ends of the earth. Even when, for a time, they bring no outward visible punishment, they strike inward, and inflict the most fatal punishment upon him, in the deterioration of his own character, in the fears they breed, in his polluted memory, in his growing aptitude for evil, in the desires they excite, in the habits they confirm, in his gathering indifference to that which is pure and good and fair. But we need no apostle, no angel out of heaven, to teach us that. Our poets, our moralists, our philosophers, our very novelists, have long sung in that key. And our own hearts, our consciences, our experience of life, have taken up and swelled the strain. We need no further witness to the fact of Retribution. But there is no *gospel* in the fact. It brings no good tidings to us, but rather tidings of despair. A gospel of Redemption would be good news indeed, if it could possibly be true; but a gospel of Retribution is a mere contradiction in terms."

If in these words I have at all fairly described your attitude as you listen to my text and ponder over it, permit me, in reply, to ask: Have you, then, *learned* the lesson which so many teachers have impressed on you, so learned it as to walk by it? Do you attune your life to the strain they have sung? Are you so sure that every man must receive according to his deeds that you have made your ways and doings good, that you dread and resist every temptation to do evil? You respect

and observe the law of gravity because you are quite sure that it is a law. Do you shew an equal respect for the law of retribution? If not, many as have been your teachers, you may still need to have the law enforced upon you, and neither angel nor apostle is wasting the time and energy which he expends in teaching you what you still need to learn.

Consider, again: if the *law* of retribution is familiar to you, is it nothing to you to be assured, and assured on the highest authority, that what you admit to be a law is also a *gospel*? When we are told that God's judgments on sin are an eternal gospel, a gospel for all beings in all ages, what is implied? *This* is implied—and there is no truth more precious or more practical—that the judgments of God are corrective, disciplinary, redemptive; that they are designed to turn us away from the sins by which they are provoked; that the message they bring us, and bring from Heaven, is, "Cease to do evil, learn to do well."

Nothing can be more wholesome for us, and no truer or nobler comfort can be given us, when we are suffering the painful consequences of our evil deeds, than the assurance that these retributions are intended for our good; not to injure or destroy us, but to quicken life in us, or the godly sorrow which worketh life. Nothing can be more wholesome or consolatory than the conviction that the law which makes punishment the other

half of sin was designed in love and mercy, not in anger and vengeance. And, surely, up to a certain point at least, we can *see* that this law is a good law, deterring us from evil, driving and inviting us toward that which is good. If the links which bind pain and loss to wrongdoing were broken, if suffering did not wait on sin, should we be the better and the happier for it, the stronger against temptation, the more resolute in our pursuit of goodness? Would the world be the better or the happier for it? But if the law work good, it *is* good; *i.e.*, it is a gospel as well as a law. If it would be bad news that the law was to be repealed, it must be good news that it is to stand fast for ever, that God always has, and always will, judge men after their deeds and reward them according to their ways.

That there is much in the operation of this law which as yet we cannot fathom, or cannot prove to be good, must be admitted. One man's guilt is another man's loss or pain. We often suffer as much from our ignorance as from our sins. The best people often have the hardest life. And here, as we cannot walk by sight, we *must* walk by faith. The only question is *in which faith* we will walk; in the belief that God is unjust and unmerciful, or in the belief that these unprovoked or undeserved sufferings are also intended for our good, that there is that in them to thank God for as well as that which we cannot but fear. St. John elects the

nobler alternative. With him, judgment is always mercy, and suffering, since it is a discipline in holiness and perfection, a call to thanksgiving and joy. Retribution is a gospel, an eternal gospel, to him, because it is medicinal and redemptive, because it either corrects that which is evil in us, or because it is a discipline by which we are prepared for larger good.

2. But this mystery of unprovoked or disproportionate suffering may grow clearer to us as we consider that, in his eternal gospel, St. John includes not only present, but also future, judgments. The angel is always proclaiming judgment, but he also proclaims "hours" of judgment, crises in which the whole story of a life, a race, or an age, is summed up, and finally adjusted by an unerring standard. Such an hour was then at hand. Such an hour is never far off from any one of us. The minutes may pass silently on the great clock of Time, but the hours *strike*; and when the last hour strikes, whether for us individually or for the world at large, there is to be a great clearing up, a great adjustment and readjustment of accounts.

No fact, no truth, proclaimed by Christ, and by his angels or messengers, has been invested with more awful terrors than this of the last judgment—the last, or at least the last for us, the judgment which closes this earthly span. And, to flesh and blood, it must always be full of terror. Faith itself must always contemplate

it with a certain awe. For though, to the eye of reason, "the last judgment" is simply a solemn and picturesque symbol of the fact, that the law of retribution will be as efficient, and perhaps more obviously efficient in the world to come than it is in this world, yet even reason herself must admit that the start we make in any world goes far to determine our course in it and our lot ; while faith discerns issues of life and death depending on that judgment, and trembles under the burden of an eternal, or agelong, doom.

However carefully we may have studied the New Testament, then, and however large may be our trust in the mercy of God, it can hardly fail to strike us with surprise that this future judgment, which the Church has depicted in the darkest hues, should be spoken of as a "gospel," a gospel for all men and for all ages, and that we should be invited to look forward to it with thanksgiving as well as with awe. And yet there are considerations which may well abate our surprise.

For, with all his fear of judgment, there is a deep craving for justice, in every man's heart, and a profound conviction that, in some respects at least, he has never had it, or never had it to the full. His neighbours have wronged him. He has had to suffer for their folly, their extravagance, their crimes, their sins. His actions have been misrepresented, his motives misconstrued. Or he has been weighted from the first with some hereditary

bias, or some defect of person or manner, so that he could never shew himself for what he is, and win the respect and love he craved. Or circumstances have been against him; and he has never been able to get the culture he longed for and prized, or to use it to any purpose when he had got it, or to do half the liberal, honourable, and kindly things his heart devised. Poverty, drudgery, grief, and care, have exhausted him, leaving him no leisure and no force for pursuing the loftier aims of life. Or he has been unfortunate in the relationships he has formed, and found them a burden instead of a help. Or he has been compelled to adopt a calling for which he has no liking, and which does not give scope for half his powers. Or when all was well with him, a killing frost suddenly fell on him in the summer of his days—his health failed him, his business fell away, his reputation was cruelly assailed, or the light of his home and heart was put out.

As you all know, as some of you may know only too well, there are men who, in a thousand different ways, have been crippled, hampered, thwarted, defeated in the race of life, who have never had a fair chance, whose hearts have been shaken and soured by the accidents and changes of time; men to whom life has grown to be a perplexity, a muddle, if not a despair, so that they can very hardly hold fast their faith in the Providence which shapes our ends for us, roughhew or mishew them

how we will. And if to any of these sufferers from misfortune or injustice, sitting in darkness and asking, "What *does* it all mean?" you could say, and say with conviction and authority: "It means that the end is not yet; but the end is coming. God will yet do you ample justice, redress all your wrongs, compensate you for all your losses, turn all your sorrows into joy, make you what you would be, and enable you to do and to get all you crave:"—would not such a message be a true gospel to him? If he could believe it, would it not be to him as life from the dead? Would *he* be slow to give glory unto God?

Nay, is there not something in this gospel which attracts us all? Surely most of us feel that, owing to lack of opportunity and favourable conditions, we have not been able to do justice to ourselves, to what is best, tenderest, finest, shyest, in ourselves; or that we have been unjustly handled—misunderstood, undervalued, disliked, wronged—by some of our fellows, and even by some who would have loved and aided us had they known us as we are. And is it not good news that when we pass from the hasty censures of a busy and careless, if not a cruel, world, we shall be weighed in finer scales and a truer balance? that our most inward and delicate motives will be taken into account, as well as the blundering actions which so ill expressed them, by One who knows us altogether, and reads the thoughts and intents of the heart?

Fear God, then, and give Him glory, for the hour of his judgment is coming, and is nigh. You cannot help but fear Him, indeed ; for his pure eyes must discern much evil in you which you have failed to detect ; and at his bar you will have to answer for *your* injustice to your neighbours, for the wrongs you have done them, for your misconstructions of their characters, their actions, their motives. When the secrets of all hearts are disclosed, you will find that much which you resented in them as unkind or unjust was not, or was not meant to be, either unjust or unkind : and you may discover that you have failed in your duty to them quite as often as they have failed in their duty to you. You are sure to discover that in many different ways you have failed in your duty to their God and yours, and that by your sins against Him you have wronged your own souls even more deeply than any of your neighbours have been able to wrong you. But, according to St. John, with fear or reverence we are to blend thanksgiving. According to him, Retribution is a gospel as well as a law, and we are to give glory to God even as we advance toward his judgment-seat. And how could we do that if we did not believe that, as in this world, so also in the world to come, judgment will be mercy, and that all the punishments of sin will be designed for our correction, for our redemption from the bondage of evil ? How should either an apostle, or an angel, bid us bless God for the

hour of judgment as for a gospel, if there were no mercy, no hope, no blessing in it ?

3. This gospel is an eternal, or universal, gospel, a gospel for all ages, for all men. It is proclaimed unto "every nation and tribe, and tongue and people." And here, surely, we may find a theme for praise. The world is full of injustice, full of misery. Think what men suffer, and have always suffered, from the tyranny of their rulers, from the follies and crimes of statesmen, from unwise laws or a partial and imperfect administration of law, from war, vice, bigotry, superstition. Or think only of what you see immediately around you, in the little circle of which you form part. Think of the fair young lives, full of promise, which you have seen suddenly broken off ; of strong men stricken down into helplessness in a moment, of good women pining away in penury or wasting with disease, of honest industrious men disgraced by failure or reduced to want. Think of the fond parents who have lost their children, of the tender children who have been left to battle alone with a hard indifferent world, of loving husbands and wives separated by the stroke of death. And as you think of these common events, events as common in every other circle as in your own, what a gospel is this which the angel, flying in mid-heaven, proclaims with a great voice ? "This world is not all. It is not the end, but only the beginning ; and the beginnings of life are always obscure and mysterious.

The hour of judgment is coming, in which the mystery will be explained and vindicated; in which God will redress every wrong, compensate every loss, reunite all sundered hearts, give scope for all lives which have been stunted and broken off to develop into their full beauty and perfection, find better work for those to do who have been cut off in a career of usefulness, and by the very punishments which his justice inflicts correct and redeem those who have suffered this world to be too much with them."

Take the world as it is, cut it off from the great astronomical system of which it forms part, and it is a mystery which none can fathom. And take human life as it is, as a story without a sequel, and you can only give it up as an insoluble problem, a mighty maze without a plan. But listen to this Gospel of Retribution, connect this world with the world, or worlds, in heaven, regard the present life as an introduction to, a discipline for, a larger happier life to come, and your burden is eased; the problem becomes capable of a happy solution. If you must still fear God, you can also give Him glory because the hour of his judgment is coming, the hour at which He will gather the whole world under his rule, and all nations and tribes, and tongues and peoples, shall become his people and know Him for their God.

That this law of Retribution has another aspect, that the justice of God must be full of terror for as many as

cleave to their sins and will not let them go, none of us who worship here are likely to forget.¹ But this aspect is not set before us in the text. Here we have only to do with *the gospel* in the law of Retribution. Let it be enough for the present, then, if this gospel has been proclaimed, and if we have found in it good tidings of great joy to all who dwell upon the earth.

¹ On Retribution viewed as a Law see Discourses 2, 9, 12, in Volume I.

IX.

THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER.

I.—BE CLEAN !

“And there cometh to him a leper, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And being moved with compassion, he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will, be thou made clean. And straightway the leprosy departed from him, and he was made clean.”—MARK i. 40-42.

AMONG the Jews no leper was allowed to enter the Sanctuary, or to mix with his healthy neighbours, or so much as to live within the city walls. He was wholly cut off from the sweet uses and charities of life, a banned, and often a solitary, outcast. According to the Mosaic law, he was bound to dwell without the camp, alone, to go with bare head and torn garments, and to warn off any who approached him by crying out, “Unclean, unclean !”

Surely a very cruel law ; for leprosy is not contagious, though it may be transmitted from father to son. Nor is there any reason to suppose that Moses thought it

contagious, that his law was intended as a sanitary precaution. For, outside Judea, the leper was not separated from his neighbours, nor even held to be incapable of holding high offices of State. Naaman, the leper, commanded the armies of Syria, and the King of Syria worshipped leaning on his arm. In almost every other Eastern land lepers ate at the public table, and were admitted to the public service. And even in Judea the *foreign* leper was expressly excluded from the scope of the Mosaic law, and even the native leper was freely handled by the priests, whose duty it was to examine and to pronounce upon his case.

1. But if this law was not a sanitary precaution, What was it? It was a living symbolism, an acted parable. It was one of many illustrations of a principle which pervades the whole Mosaic Code. According to that code, whatever spoke of death spoke of sin; whatever was related to death—as a grave, a bier, a corpse, and even the appliances of a sick bed—was ceremonially unclean: to touch it was to become unclean. Logically carried out, the principle involved the uncleanness of every kind of disease to which man is liable. But in his mercy God selected one form of disease, one out of many, and stamped *this* as unclean, as unfitting men for the society of a holy people and the services of a holy place, that He might thus mark his abhorrence of all the forms which bear witness to the power of death and sin.

Just as He set apart one meal to sanctify all meals, and one day to hallow every day ; just as He took the first-fruits to assert his claim to the entire harvest, and the firstborn to assert his claim to the entire family, so also He selected one disease for a public condemnation in order to disclose his anger against that root of evil from which all diseases spring.

And, as might have been expected, He chose for this purpose one of the most frightful and loathsome forms of disease. Leprosy was a living death. It was a gradual and horrible dissolution, the body rotting *out of* the grave instead of in it. And it was wrapt in a mystery which made it still more dreadful. No man could tell how, or why, it came ; it was wholly beyond the reach of medical science and art. When the King of Damascus sent Naaman to the Jewish king for cure, Joram was dismayed and cried out, "Am I *God*, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man from his leprosy?" In that age at least it seemed as impossible to cure a leper as to quicken life in the dead.

The leper, then, bearing about in himself the outward signs of human guilt, though not necessarily of his own guilt, was a living and ghastly parable of the death which Sin, when it is mature, brings forth. With bare head, and rent garments, garments rent as for one dead, and raising his mournful cry, "Unclean, unclean!" as often as he

approached the haunts of men, he mourned for himself as one already cut off from the land of the living. He *was* cut off from life, however great his gifts, however lofty his position. Even Miriam the prophetess, even Uzziah the valiant and sagacious king, were shut out from camp and city. So impressively were the Jews taught—and we are taught through them—that sin worketh death, and that the death of sin excludes men from the pure and happy kingdom of God.

The law, I said, was a cruel law. Does it look more merciful now, now that we know that it was not meant for a sanitary precaution, but for a religious parable? Is it like God, and his mercy, thus heavily to afflict one man for the instruction, for the good, of his neighbours?

Well, yes; I think it is. Vicarious suffering is a common, a universal, law of human life. We suffer for the sins of our fathers, of our children, of our statesmen and rulers, of our customers and servants, and even for the sins of those of our neighbours with whom we have no special and intimate relation. In a sense far closer and other than the Roman meant, "*Nothing* human is alien to us." If for, and by, the sins of men a war is waged in France, in Germany, in America, in India, or even in some small island of a distant sea, we here in England suffer from it, and suffer just where some of us are most keenly sensitive, in the pocket. Is it not hard that we should suffer for sins not our own, when we have

so many of our own for which to suffer? It *is* hard; but it may be very wholesome for us nevertheless. By suffering for the sins of others, we may be delivered from our own sins. We may be taught to hate and renounce them; and it is worth while to suffer if, by suffering, we may be redeemed from the power and yoke of sin or be made perfect in holiness. The Lord Jesus suffered for the sins of the whole world. Was not that hard? Yet even He was made perfect by the things which He suffered; and, for that joy, He despised the cross. Shall we fret at our cross, if it will help to make us partakers of his holiness and perfection? Shall even the leper fret at *his* cross?

If this life were all, the leper under the Mosaic law, smitten with a foul and cruel disease for no fault of his own, and then cast out from their fellowship by the very men for whose instruction he was smitten, might well account himself the most miserable of men, and the more miserable because the most unjustly used. If you could go to him and say: "Sir, do not be cast down; do not murmur and complain. True, you have to suffer the ravages of a most loathsome disease, and even to be despised and rejected by those whom you teach and warn. Still you *do* teach them. You are an incarnate parable. You make men dread the sin which bears such deadly fruit." If you were to say that, it would seem very cold comfort to him, would it not? Yes, at first

perhaps ; but the more he thought of it, and in proportion as there were any noble and heroic elements in his nature, any willingness to suffer for the good of others, any of that *altruism* which our very Agnostics proclaim to be the chief virtue of man, your comfortable words would gather warmth and inspiration, and prove to be the most comfortable he could hear. And, then, if you could point him to the Man of men, and tell him how Christ came down from heaven to suffer for us all, to do, in fact, the very work which he, the poor leper, was doing in his measure ; if you could also talk to him of the perfection which comes through suffering, of the great and high rewards which God bestows on as many as toil and endure for the sake of others, you might breathe a very pure and noble ambition into him : if he were a genuinely good man, he might even become a willing sacrifice that he might serve God and his neighbours, and so win life from his very death. But he *must* be a very good man : for which of us would be content to become a leper that, through us, God might teach and bless our fellows ? Which of us would willingly hang on a cross that we might fill up that which is left of Christ's affliction for the salvation of the world ? We should think such a lot very hard ; and yet it might be a far more good and glorious lot than any we should choose for ourselves. And so, no doubt, many of the Jewish lepers thought theirs a cruelly hard fate, and failed to get from it

either the good, or the honour, they might have got from it.

If they did, who are we that we should censure and condemn them? Few of our greatest or most painful sacrifices are made quite voluntarily or cheerfully, though we may be very thankful for them when they are past, or when we have learned to bear them and to get the good of them. If God send us a deforming accident, or a keen yet abiding pain, or a great loss, or a deep wound to the heart, or even any little fret and worry in our business or our home life, our first thought is not always, "Here is an opportunity of serving God and man. If I take my trial patiently, bravely, cheerfully, I shall help my neighbours to believe that there is a real power in religion, and dispose them to trust in God and to bow to his high Will." That is not often our first thought, I fear, though it may be our last. We fret, we cry out; both our courage and our patience fail us; we think no one was ever so ill-used as we; our own troubles engross us, though we know, in our calmer moods, that many of our neighbours have still heavier troubles to bear; our burden absorbs our whole attention, and we have no eye for the blessing which is hidden in it and conveyed by it. It takes long for us to compose and adjust ourselves to our task, and to live out a religious parable for the teaching of our fellows. And it takes still longer for us to account it an honour that

we should be thought worthy to suffer for the glory of God and for the good of men.

Yet we call and profess ourselves Christians, and that quite sincerely. And Christians are men and women who are animated by the spirit of Christ and walk even as He walked. He became a curse for the world. He came to his own, and his own received Him not. *He* was despised and rejected by the very men He came to teach and to save. And if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. If we do not suffer with Him, we cannot reign with Him.

2. We fall short of the Perfect Man, then. We also fall short of very imperfect men. For here, in our story, is a leper who wished indeed to be cleansed from his leprosy, as was natural and right; but who, nevertheless, was content to remain a leper if Christ thought that best, which, though right, was surely something more than natural. "*Full* of leprosy," he draws near to Jesus with the cry, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." And this cry was the utterance of an astonishing and sublime faith. For, consider. The Lord Jesus had not long commenced his public ministry. He had only just delivered the Sermon on the Mount. He had not fully shewed Himself unto Israel. The leper could not possibly have heard many of his words, or have seen many of his works. He may have sat on the mountain, apart from the groups which gathered immediately round

Jesus, and have heard the divinest words which ever fell from human lips. But a great multitude had also heard them. Yet none but the leper seems to have felt that He who spake as never man spake must be more than man, the Lord from heaven. He, however, does not hesitate to address Christ as "LORD;" nay, he "worships" this "lord" as God. He kneels down and falls down (Luke v. 12) on his face before Him, as though seeing in Him a divine and insufferable majesty. And his words are of a piece with his worship: "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He has no doubt of Christ's *power* to heal a disease which yet was beyond the scope of human power. Nor does he doubt, as our English translation seems to imply, Christ's *willingness* to heal and bless him. He rather, as the Greek conveys, recognizes the perfect grace of Christ's will: he is sure that Christ will heal him if it is good for him to be healed. He knows that only an exertion of that omnipotent will is requisite, and that that Will always stands at the giving point. But he is humble; he distrusts himself and his own wisdom: what *he* thinks good may not be good for him after all. And so he refers himself solely to the pure and kindly will of Christ, leaves the decision to Him, and is prepared to accept it whatever it may be.

This, surely, was nothing short of a sublime act of faith in one so miserable and, comparatively, so untaught. Yet, as we know, this attitude of perfect faith, this

cheerful and unforced accord of our will with the Divine Will, is the true posture of devotion. For faith is not a mere recognition of Divine truths and realities. It is not a careless, or even a careful, acceptance of dogma. It is a profound personal trust in Christ, or in God, a perfect acquiescence in his will as a good and kind will, an entire content with his ordinance for us, whatever the form it may take. We may accredit all that the Bible contains, and all that theologians have drawn out of it or put into it. We may observe all the ordinances and sacraments of the Church, and be very zealous in the service of its institutions; but we have neither the true faith nor the true devotion until our will coalesces with the will of God, runs into it and becomes one with it.

This ignorant and miserable outcast puts us all to shame. *He* is content to bear and do Christ's will even though it should leave him still bound in the chains of pain and death and shame; while we too often cannot submit to that will, or cannot cheerfully submit to it, if our nerves ache, or a neighbour speaks irritably to us or we are called to endure some loss or suffering which cannot for a moment be compared to the leper's living death.

3. And if the leper puts us to shame, how much more does Christ the Healer! "Moved with compassion, he put forth his hand and *touched* him." Now to touch a leper was to become a leper, in the eye of the Law and

of the Priests. So that to heal a leper Christ became a leper, just as to save sinners He who knew no sin became sin for us !

Imagine the feeling of the leper, from whose approach all men shrank with an instinctive and cultivated loathing, when that pure and gracious Hand was laid upon him. What comfort was in that touch, and what promise ! For how should Christ take him by the hand, and not heal him ? how bid him rise, and lift him from the dust, without also raising him from death to life ?

The touch of Christ was his response to the leper's worship ; but as he fell first on his knees, and then on his face, the leper had uttered a prayer ; and his prayer also wins a response. The prayer was, "*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" And the answer is, "*I will, be thou made clean.*" Word answers to word ; the response of Christ is a mere echo of the leper's prayer. "Use thy will for my help, if it be thy will," cried the leper. "I use it," is the reply, "for it is my will to help." "Make me clean," begged the leper ; and Christ replied, "Be thou clean." The answer is an exact echo of the request. But the echo which the mountain gives back to our cry is, as you must often have noticed, calm and pure and musical, however harsh or dissonant or strained our voice may be. Your cry or shout may rise into a piercing scream ; but if you wait and listen, it comes back to you with all the discord and excite-

ment strained out of it, comes back at times with a mystical force and sweetness and purity. And when the leper heard his passionate cry come back from the lips of Christ, must there not have been a heavenly sweetness and power in that gracious echo? Must he not have wondered how his poor words should have suddenly grown instinct with a celestial music and energy?

He could hear the echo to his prayer. But often, for us at least, the heavenly response is so much more pure and heavenly than the earthly passion of our prayer, that we catch no echo, and feel as if our prayer had been passed over by our God. We ask for ease, for rest, for peace; and God sends us trouble as the only means to ease, toil as the path to rest, conflict as the way to peace. And we do not recognize the echo. We said "Ease," and the Mountain, or God from the mountain of his holiness, answers, "Trouble"; we said "Rest," and the Mountain answers "Toil"; we said "Peace," and the Mountain answers "Conflict." Call you that echoing our cries? Yes, indeed: for how can God give us what we cannot take? And before we can take ease, if our ease is to be heavenly, we must pass through many purifying troubles; before we can find the true rest, we must get our work done; before we can be at peace, we must have fought our fight and won our victory.

When we cry, "Make us clean," God always answers, "Be thou clean," but that is not always the answer we hear or seem to hear. We often ask God to create a clean heart within us when He can only cleanse our hearts with a torrent of affliction or with bitter tears of repentance. And then to our, "Make us clean," the Mountain may seem to reply, "I send you sorrow," and we do not at once perceive that the sorrow is a cleansing sorrow, and that God is really answering the very prayer we offered.

Not always, not at once, are our prayers answered in the very terms of our prayer. Do you suppose that this leper had never prayed before he met Jesus? Do you not rather assume that his constant daily prayer had been, "Lord, make me clean"? *Now* the echo comes swift and clear, "Be thou made clean. He had never heard such an echo before. But had his previous prayers been left unanswered? Unanswered! Every one of them had been answered. It was the answers to his prayers which had prepared him to recognize the Christ when He came, to fall at his feet and to call Him "Lord." It was the answers to his earlier prayers which had prepared him to pray now, and had qualified him to receive a reply which sent a new life leaping through body and soul.

Let us take the comfort of that thought. We need it sorely. How often have we said, "Create a clean heart

in us, O God ;” or “Give us faith ;” or “Make us pure :” and yet we are put to shame this morning by the faith, the cheerful obedience and submission, of a poor outcast who was content to remain a loathsome and solitary leper if that should prove to be the Lord’s will for him. Have we prayed in vain then ? Surely not, if our prayers have been sincere. If we have sought the Lord by endeavour as well by prayer, we have had our answers ; and these answers are preparing us for a time, and for the joy of a time, when to our “Make us clean,” God will reply not by making us a little cleaner, or by allotting us purifying sorrows and toils and conflicts, but by making us every whit clean and whole. As yet the Divine Mountain may have yielded us only mysterious and doubtful replies ; but let us still cry on in hope ; for soon the pure heavenly echo to our best desires will fall like a celestial music on our ears, and send the pulses of a perfect and immortal life leaping through our souls.

X.

THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER.

II.—BE SILENT.

“And he strictly charged him, and straightway sent him out, and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man : but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing the things which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but was without in desert places.”—MARK i. 43-45.

OF the earlier verses of this story I gave you an exposition last Sunday morning. The main points of that exposition were these : (1) That the Mosaic law which banished the leper from camp and city, which condemned him to go with bare head and rent garment, as one who mourned his own death, and to cry, “Unclean, unclean !” so often as he approached the haunts of men, was not a sanitary precaution, but a dramatic religious parable, setting forth God’s hatred for the various forms of disease and death which spring from sin ; that it was but one of many illustrations of the law of vicarious

sacrifice, which constantly compels one man to suffer for the sins of others. (2) That the faith of the leper is a standing rebuke to our weak and imperfect faith, since here was a man who, though he knew little of Christ, worshipped him as the true "Lord" of men, and was even content to remain a leper all his life if that should be Christ's will for him. And (3) that so often as we ask for cleansing, God echoes our prayer with "Be thou clean;" but that the echo is often of so pure and heavenly a strain that we fail to recognize in it the response to our prayer.

And now, without further preface or recapitulation, I must ask your attention to the closing sentences of the narrative: to our Lord's command to the leper He had cleansed; and to the leper's blended obedience and disobedience to that command.

1. And, first, for *our Lord's command*. No sooner is the leper cleansed than, instead of bidding him bear witness to the grace and power by which he had been healed, the Lord Jesus strictly, or even sternly, enjoins him to "say nothing to any man," but to go and shew himself to the priests "for a testimony unto them."

This is not at all the command we should have expected; and we cannot but ask, therefore, for the reason of it. We should have thought that the man's first duty was *not* to hold his peace, but to tell every man he met "what a great Saviour he had found," and

to urge them to repair to the Healer, in order that they too might be made whole. With many of us it is a thread-bare commonplace that those who have been saved by Christ are bound, as their first and most urgent duty, to bear witness to his salvation, and to bring others to the Cross in which they have found healing and peace. Yet here, and in many similar cases, the Lord Jesus bids the man whom He has cleansed and saved "say nothing to any man;" *i.e.*, He forbids him to publish and blaze abroad the tidings of his salvation; forbids him, *i.e.*, to take the very line which many a raw, ignorant, and unproved convert is encouraged to take to-day, and encouraged to take by men who claim a special religious earnestness and zeal.

Now why was that? Can it be that a very common conception of Christian duty is after all inaccurate and misleading, and that it is *not* every convert's first and great duty to bear verbal witness to the Saviour who has redeemed him? It may be that this is an inaccurate and misleading conception of Christian duty; and for myself I think it is. But, assuredly, there were other reasons for our Lord's prohibition; and it may be well to look at these first.

Doubtless one reason why our Lord enjoined silence on many of those whom He had healed was, that He did not as yet wish to draw on Himself the public attention. He came not to strive, and cry, and make

his voice heard in the streets. It was perilous to the higher objects of his mission that the people of Galilee, ignorant and sensual in their thoughts, as they necessarily were, should crowd round Him, and try to make Him by force the sort of King He would not be. And therefore, for a time, He set Himself to repress the eager zeal of his converts and disciples. He desired to go quietly about his work, sowing seeds of truth and grace which might hereafter bring forth fair fruit abundantly. When "his own" had been prepared to receive Him, then, but not before, He would court the publicity from which as yet He shrank. It was not that He had anything to hide, but that He had so much to do, so much that could not be done amid glare and noise.

Another and more special reason for his prohibition in the case before us was, that He wished the leper to discharge a special duty: viz., to bear a "testimony to the priests." For Christ cared for the absent priests, in distant Jerusalem, no less than for the leper's immediate neighbours of Galilee. And the testimony He wished to send them could hardly have failed to make a deep and auspicious impression on their minds. As yet they were prejudiced against Jesus of Nazareth. Almost all they knew of Him was the divine indignation, the prophetic authority, with which He had driven the brokers from the Temple. They thought of Him as a zealot, a fanatic, who had swept away corruptions at

which they had connived, by which they had profited. Probably they feared that He might set Himself to destroy, rather than to fulfil, the Mosaic law, or that He might undermine their authority with the people. In the earlier part of his ministry, you must remember, men's thoughts of Jesus were unformed, fluid, indefinite. No class or faction had pronounced either for or against Him. The priests, possibly, a little suspected and feared Him—priests commonly do fear originality and zeal: but some of them had been impressed by his words and bearing and claims; while others, who cared very little whether He was or was not the Messiah, waited to see whether it would not be wise to take Him up and use Him as a political tool. And Jesus cared for them *all*; He would fain have brought them all to a knowledge of the truth and a better mind.

Now if the leper had done as he was bid, if he had held his peace, if he had gone straight to Jerusalem and told the priests that Jesus had sent him to them in order that they might examine him by the Mosaic tests and say whether he was clean, and if he had taken them the offerings which Moses had commanded the cleansed leper to present before the Lord, he would have carried them "a testimony" which could hardly have failed to produce a happy effect on their minds. For they confessed that leprosy was a disease quite beyond mortal reach, which only God could arrest. If, then, they were

satisfied that Jesus had healed this Galilean, that at his mere word the leper's tainted flesh and rotting bones had taken new vigour and freshness, they might have felt that *God* must be with the Man who had wrought so great a cure, and have scrupled to oppose Him. At the lowest, they would have been prepossessed in his favour.

This favourable impression would have been vastly strengthened by the fact that He, who had cleansed the leper, recognized their position and authority, that He had sent the leper to *them*, with the customary gifts, that they might certify him to be clean in the usual form. His deference to their priestly authority could hardly have failed to propitiate them. His deference to the law of Moses might have led those who sat in Moses' chair to indulge the hope that He was bent on establishing the law, not on making it void.

So that had the leper forthwith obeyed the command of Christ, he would, in two ways, have carried a very impressive "testimony" to the priests. First, his very healing would have testified that Jesus of Nazareth wielded a divine power; and, then, the deference of Jesus to the law and to the priesthood would have predisposed them in his favour. But, obviously, much of the effect of the man's testimony would depend on his full and instant obedience. If he lingered in Galilee, or on the way; if, instead of carrying the news straight to

the priests, he prated to every man he met ; if thus, long before he reached them, they heard confused and misleading rumours of the miracle, his message would lose much of its value. Till the priests had pronounced him clean, moreover, he was a leper in the eye of the law ; he had no right to enter the cities and talk with men. If he broke the law, if he delayed to present himself to the constituted authorities, if he assumed that he was clean before they pronounced him clean, they would infer that both he and his Healer were wanting in respect both to them and to the law they were appointed to administer. All the grace, all the courtesy and deference, of our Lord's act would be cast away.

It *was* cast away. The leper, though clean, was not "perfect," and could not rule his unruly tongue. He came to the priests, if he came at all, *late*, instead of going first to them,—observing their law only after he had broken it ; and thus the special value and force of his "testimony to the priests" was impaired, if not lost.

This of itself, I think, would be a sufficient reason for our Lord's injunction, if it stood alone. But it does not stand alone. It is one of many similar injunctions. On almost all of those who were first healed by Him, the Lord Jesus imposed silence and reserve. They were not to "follow" Him, much as they desired it, but to go back to their old place and do their old duties in a new

and higher spirit. They were not "to blaze abroad the matter," but to hold their peace and tell no man. An injunction so habitually given must have had a large and general meaning ; it cannot have been prompted simply by special and personal motives. No doubt there *was* some good pertinent reason for it in every single case. No doubt *this* reason was common to all these cases, that the Lord Jesus did not wish, till the hour struck and men were prepared for it, to become the mark of public attention ; that He shrank from becoming the centre of enthusiastic crowds, the occasion, or the excuse, of political tumults. But, besides these, we cannot but feel that there must be some reason in our common human nature for this constant injunction to silence ; that the Lord Jesus must have been thinking of the spiritual welfare of men when He forbade them to bear public witness to his marvellous works.

And one such reason is to be found, I think, in the very different estimate put on miracles by Christ and by the Church. We have been in the habit,—for many centuries men have been in the habit,—of regarding miracles as, above all else, proofs and evidences of the truth. It is only of late years that the more thoughtful students of the Word have come to suspect that miracles are a burden which the Gospel has to carry rather than wings of proof which bear it up. But, however *we* may regard them, our Lord and his Apostles laid very little

stress upon them. St. Paul, for instance, tells us incidentally that he wrought many and great miracles at Corinth (2 Corinthians xii. 12), but we have no record of any one of them. And our Lord Himself, as was natural in One to whom nothing was impossible, speaks with a certain contempt of mere marvels, and of the faith which rests on them. He promises that *we* shall do "greater works" than any He did; He affirms that only those are truly blessed who can believe without seeing signs and wonders. Is it any wonder, then, that He did not care to be known as a Thaumaturgist, but rather as a Teacher; that He did not care to have his miracles blazed abroad, but did care to have "a testimony" borne to men? To the leper, possibly, nothing was so grand, nothing so desirable, as the power to work miracles; but Jesus knew "a more excellent way," and held not love alone, but almost any ethical and spiritual virtue, to be worth far more than tongues, or prophecy, or the faith that can only remove a mountain. For this reason, therefore, among many others, He bade the leper "say nothing" of the miracle which made him clean "to any man."

Consider, too, how religious emotion evaporates in talk, how virtue goes out of us in the words we utter. Every man has only his own limited measure of spiritual energy; and if his stock be small, instead of expending it in speech, it will be a wise thrift of him to reserve it for

action, for conduct, which Matthew Arnold assures us is three-fourths of human life. If you hear a truth pathetically set forth, or if you witness any incident of an impressive kind, certain emotions and impulses are quickened and released within you. You are uneasy till you have expressed them. You feel that, after having been so moved, you must *do* something to shew your sympathy or admiration. If you hold your tongue, you probably *will* do something ; you will be impelled to some kindly action or to a more perfect obedience to the truth. But if you talk and talk about it, you "unpack your heart with words;" you dissipate your energy or passion in mere speech. You have found your vent, and you can be at rest.

Have you never observed that ? never observed how speech lowers and stales emotion ? never found that the more, and the more warmly, you talk of truth, of love, of service, the less need you feel for action ? If you have, you can understand how wise and kind it was of the Lord Jesus to bid the leper "say nothing to any man," and how foolish it was of the leper to unpack his heart with words, to go about blazing abroad the matter, instead of going quietly to bear his testimony to the priests. These blazing fires of speech *consume* the material on which they feed.

Suppose he had strictly obeyed the strict charge of Christ. Suppose that, in place of lingering to prate and

gossip with his neighbours, and dwelling on all that was marvellous in the miracle till he had exhausted the fountains of wonder and awe, he had gone silently to Jerusalem with the offerings which Moses had commanded, brooding as he went over the great work which had been wrought upon him, and recalling the Master's words and look and touch ; would he not have been the more likely to enter into the spiritual meaning of the physical cure, to have recognized in Christ the Saviour of the soul as well as of the body, and to devote himself with all his heart to the service of Christ ? As he mused, would not the fire have burned and grown, instead of blazing out in mere words ? Is it not always better to obey than to talk about obedience, to shew love than to profess love ?

Obviously, though no doubt he thought to honour Christ by "much publishing" what He had done, this man was not strong enough for that form of service. To what good end did he honour Christ with his tongue, while he dishonoured, by disobeying, Him in his life ? Let us take the warning, and be "swift to hear, slow to speak." Much talk about religion—and especially about the externals of religion, about miracles and proofs, about ceremonies or the affairs of the Church—so far from strengthening the spirit of devotion, is perilously apt to weaken it, and I for one, instead of expecting preachers to be better than other men, expect less of

them simply because they have to preach in all moods and all weathers. There are few who are strong enough to talk as well as to act. And there are still many who repeat the very mistake made by the Galilean leper eighteen centuries ago. They talk, and talk, and talk about religion, or about what they assume to be religion, about their Church or Chapel institutions, services, affairs, about the wonderful sermons they hear—wonderfully bad or wonderfully good—about how this great thing is to be done or that great effort made; and all the while they too often neglect the simplest duties of home or business or Church life. And their neighbours, instead of being favourably impressed and inclined towards religion, smile with contempt at so much eager noisy talk coupled with so little devout action. Such *professors* are well named; for their profession often becomes a new hindrance in the way of Christ, instead of a testimony to his healing and redeeming power.

See what harm this leper did, though doubtless he had none but a good intention, what an ill return he made for the grace of Christ. By touching the leper Christ had become a leper, in the eye of the law. The kind Hand laid upon him not only healed him, but drew him from the desert into the city and re-admitted him to the society of men. And the leper rewarded his Healer *by driving Him out of the city into the desert*. Simply because his foolish tongue would wag, "Jesus could

no more openly enter into a city, but was "compelled to remain "without in desert places." Could we have a more convincing illustration of the danger of disobedience, however pure and generous its motive may seem? Yes, for it is a still more bitter proof when we find that by our own fluent religious talk, and the easy but eager profession by which we honestly meant to serve Christ, we have alienated from Him those who stand nearest to us and know us best. And that is a proof we need not go far to seek. It is only too probable that we can all recall men who meant well enough, but who, by much talk of a religion which did not enter deeply into their life and conduct, gave their children, or their associates in business, a distaste to religion in any and every form. It is only too easy for any one of us thus to drive Christ from his natural kingdom in honest and good hearts into the desert without, by what we mistake for sheer gratitude for his having drawn us from dark solitary places into the light and fellowship of his Church.

2. But some of you may ask: *How* came this leper to disobey the word of the Lord? how are we to reconcile the inconsistencies of his character? Here was a man of so sublime a faith that, had it been Christ's will, he was content to remain a leper all his life, and yet he cannot even hold his tongue when Christ straightly charges him to hold it!

Is *that* a puzzle to you, my brethren? It ought not to be a puzzle, and could not be if you were thoughtful students of your own hearts. Have you yet to learn that it is much easier to brace oneself for great endeavours than to maintain a faithful discharge of simple and lesser duties? easier to suffer death, for example, in some great cause than to set such a watch over the lips as never to offend? easier to make a great sacrifice for some worthy end than to keep one's temper under the slight frets and provocations which every day brings with it? I do not doubt that the leper would have found it much easier to lay down his life for Christ's sake than to hold his tongue for Christ's sake, just as Naaman, the Syrian leper, would have found it easier to "do some great thing" than simply to bathe in the Jordan. A great faith is not always a patient and submissive faith. The faith that can remove mountains will not always condescend to lift pebbles from a brother's path. We must not think too hardly of the leper, therefore, because he could not refrain his tongue. The man who can rule that member is a perfect man, says St. James, for his faith covers his whole life down to its lightest action.

We should also remember into what fatal languors great spiritual excitement is apt to react. Revivals of religion are often attended by sins of sense; those who are full of the Spirit one hour, may be, as St. Paul

reminds us, full of spirits, full of strong drink, the next. Are we therefore to pronounce them insincere, to say that there was no reality in their religious emotion, that they were simply playing the hypocrite? Only a pitiable ignorance of ourselves and of our neighbours will allow us to say that. For who has not found, with terror and surprise, that the holiest moments of life are apt to be followed by the most unholy? that when our hearts have been drawn nearest to heaven, so soon as the spiritual excitement flags we sink into our lowest and most earthly moods? There is no time at which we need to be so much on our guard as when we have been moved to profound religious emotion. At such times the flesh seems to lie in wait for its revenge, and the lusts of the flesh spring on the spirit when it is weak and exhausted, and we fall from our highest pitch of devotion to the lowest depth of sin. The leper who, face to face with Christ, could live or die for Him, but no sooner quits his presence than he cannot even hold his tongue for Him, is but a glass in which we may see ourselves and read a warning against our own peril.

What is it that makes us expect to meet another and a higher class of men in the Gospels than ourselves? Why are we disappointed if Galilean peasants and artizans, if even those of them who were sick and blind, lame or leprous, shew the very weaknesses of which we ourselves are conscious? Instead of regret and dis-

appointment, we should rather feel thankfulness and joy, not that they are as weak and sinful as we, but that Christ could love and save them although they were sinful and weak. If we read the New Testament wisely, there is hardly any greater comfort for us in it than this—that its men and women are our born brothers and sisters, as inconsistent as we are, the same strange compound of good and evil, of spiritual aspiration and sensual cravings, of devotion to Christ and of disobedience to his will; and that He moves among them, full of truth and grace, to correct their errors and faults, to save them from their sins and infirmities, and to make them partakers of his holiness. If He could care for *them*, and train them, why should He not care for us and train us for his service? He does and will, until at last we stand before Him perfect and entire, lacking nothing.

XI.

THE LESSONS OF THE ORANGE-TREE.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver."—PROVERBS XXV. 11.

ALTHOUGH this was Goethe's favourite proverb, I have never been able to admire it. I have, indeed, turned from it with a certain discontent and aversion because, take it how one would, its metaphor seemed grotesque and uncouth rather than beautiful. I could find no comeliness in apples of solid gold, and nothing to enhance their comeliness, if they had any, by introducing them into "pictures" of silver, according to the Authorized Version; or piling them up, according to the Revised Version, in "baskets" of silver; or surrounding them with "filagree work" of silver, according to the Margin; or even, according to a German Version, in placing them on "salvers" of silver. In my judgment, silver and gold do not go well together as colours; while massive apples of gold in any conceivable framework of silver would furnish forth a very heavy and loaded style of ornament, offensive to all artistic taste.

But all this, as a great man has said before me, was

"pure ignorance" on my part; and it has been left to a traveller in the East (Mr. Neil, in his *Palestine Explored*) to convict me of my ignorance, and to redeem this proverb to the service of beauty.

"Apples of gold," it would seem, is a poetic name for the orange in more than one Eastern tongue—some trace of this gold, indeed, may linger in the first two letters of the word orange, since *or* is French for gold, and *or* and *argent* are, even to us, familiar heraldic terms for gold and silver. And if the gold of the Proverb is figurative, why should not the silver be figurative also, and point to the creamy white blossoms of the Orange-tree? Take it so, and the Proverb at once becomes "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever,"—as true to nature, too, as it is beautiful in itself. For the Orange-tree is one of the few trees which bear blossom and fruit together—bearing both indeed through the greater part of the year. And no one who has seen orange-trees in full blossom and full bear can have failed to note how the beauty of the golden fruit is set off by its framework of white fragrant blooms.

Now it is something, it is much, to have enriched our minds with this beautiful image; but, of course, our work is not half done until we have learned what moral the beautiful metaphor is intended to point, what it is that the golden glow of the orange, gleaming amid its silvery blossoms, has to teach us. And here, again, our

task is a somewhat difficult one, since the wording of the Proverb is condensed, elliptical, figurative, and therefore obscure, in both clauses of it. It is easy to see how our Revisers understand, "A word *fitly* spoken;" for, in the Margin, they teach us to read it as "a word spoken *in due season*." A timely, an opportune, word is, according to them, as beautiful and effective as the golden orange set off by its encircling blooms. And they have high authority for reading it thus. One of the most learned and sober commentators of Germany (Delitzsch) gives this rendering of the proverb :

Golden apples in silver salvers,
A good word spoken *according to its circumstances*;

by which somewhat clumsy rendering of the latter clause he means, doubtless, a good word adapted to time and audience, and to all the conditions of the time.

And "a word in season, how good it is!" Most of us, no doubt, can recall more than one such word, spoken in the very nick of time, and so happily adapted to our conditions at the moment, that it largely influenced our whole subsequent career,—saved us from some terrible temptation perhaps, or braced us for a resolute effort, and so made the moment momentous, a turning-point in our life. And as we look back on such words, and compute their worth to us, no image can be too rich or precious to set forth their worth.

No doubt such timely words have a certain beauty in the retrospect, as well as an inestimable value at the time. A word fitly, *i.e.*, opportunely, spoken, adapted to the instant necessity, and carrying courage and decision to the oppressed and wavering heart, has a beauty of its own, even if it be only, or mainly, the beauty of usefulness ; although perhaps it is its worth that we think of rather than its beauty.

And yet I gravely doubt whether this is the kind of word which the Proverb holds up for our admiration, whether timeliness, or pertinence, is the special beauty which the Wise Man had in his mind. I believe, rather, that by "a word *fitly* spoken" he meant not simply an opportune word, but a word which was the *fittest*, the most perfect and beautiful, expression of the thought which had to be uttered. If you glance at the margin of the Authorized Version you will learn that, in the Hebrew, the phrase rendered thus runs, "A word spoken *on its wheels*." And what can a word spoken on its wheels mean and imply but a word, or a sentence, so admirably spoken, so pat, so polished, of such fine literary quality, that it runs swiftly, smoothly, easily, to its mark, does its work and reaches its aim without fuss, or noise, or effort ? It is not timeliness, or pertinence, which the Original phrase suggests, but rather noble and effective literary form.

Every kind of thought has its appropriate expression

in language ; and for any valuable thought there is generally some one form of expression so exactly and happily right that, when once it is reached, the thought is felt to have been uttered once for all, to have received its fitting and perfect embodiment. No man can improve upon it. No man can alter a single word in it without lessening its force and lowering its quality. It bears the stamp of inevitableness, completeness, distinction. What the Wise Man admires, what he bids us admire, is those weighty and happy sentences which embody a noble thought in words of answering nobleness ; those jewels—to take an illustration from Tennyson, himself a master of these admirable sentences—

jewels five-words long
That on the stretched forefinger of all time
Sparkle for ever.

What he affirms is that a fine thought thus fitly uttered is enhanced in force and beauty, just as the golden fruit of the Orange-tree takes a new and more potent charm from the natural framework of flowers in which it is set.

And it was natural that *he* of all men should cherish this keen appreciation of literary form and quality. It was his function, as it was that of all the sages of Israel (the whole *Chokma* school), to put the best thought of his time into the most perfect forms of which it was capable ; to make poetry of it, to condense it into proverbs—into

miniature parables *i.e.*—which would catch the popular ear, or linger in the memory of the students of wisdom. Many of the great Hebrew rabbis were content, we are told, to spend their whole lives in elaborating and polishing a single saying, which might be quoted in the Schools, generation after generation, as Rabbi *So-and-So's* contribution to the general store.

The proverb, moreover, is the oldest form of poetry. In the Book of Proverbs, therefore, we should expect to find the praise, not of wisdom alone, but of the wisdom which excels in that literary art in which the Wise Men were adepts, the wisdom which can be content with nothing short of the highest excellence, the most finished beauty, of form and expression. And we find both that beauty, and its praise, in the Proverb before us: "A word on wheels, and on its own wheels, *i.e.*, a sentence which sets a noble thought to noble and appropriate music, which incarnates itself in its own proper form, and therefore goes straight to its mark, is like the fruit of the Orange-tree peeping out of its blooms: it gains an added force and charm."

1. This is the first lesson of our Orange-tree, then; that a happy, a fair and noble, utterance of a wise thought gives it a new charm, a new and victorious energy. And the Proverb is itself an exquisite illustration of that lesson. For the plain truth, that the power of a wise thought gains in proportion as it is expressed

in choice words and measured phrase, is indefinitely enhanced by the comparison of the thought to a golden fruit, and of the form to its frame of silvery blossoms. It is at once raised to a higher plane, and lives in our memory for ever, when once we have grasped the comparison and its meaning. It is like one of Tennyson's "jewels," whose intrinsic value is enhanced tenfold by the artistic labour bestowed upon it.

And if any man think that a lesson on *style*, a tiny song in praise of the nobler forms of literature, is out of place in the Bible, and not worth talking of in Church, let him remember how noble the literary forms of the Bible are, and how often he has thanked God that they are so pure and noble. Let him imagine what the Bible would be like, and how it would be shorn of its power, if it were simply a bare theological treatise, or a code of laws laying down our duties to God and man. Take the history out of it, and the biographies, and the poems, the parables, the proverbs, the splendid visions and lofty eloquence of the prophets, and what would you have left? Not assuredly a book to move, inspire, and uplift the world; but a mere *caput mortuum*, a mere skeleton of a book, which no man would willingly have about him. Are creeds, and codes, and catechisms such satisfactory and enchanting reading, do they possess a spell so irresistible, that we should be blind to the immense power which the Bible owes to the grave beauty of the style in

which it is written, to the noble forms of literature which it consecrates and employs?

Consider what it is that makes *any* book live, and clothes it with power. Is it not this very quality, that it "runs on wheels," that it goes straight to the mark, that it says something worth saying, and says it so well that it need not be said again or cast into another form? Distinction of style is almost as potent—if indeed it is not even more potent—on the life and fame of a book as depth or originality of thought. The great masters who rule us from their graves are men who, by some happy gift of nature or by taking infinite pains with their work, found once for all the most fit expression for thoughts which they shared with many who could not say what they thought so well. And that which gives them their enduring power is not any mere pomp and profusion of words, any ambitious flights of eloquence such as you may see even authors of high rank—Ruskin, Swinburne, and De Quincey, for example—set themselves to achieve; but rather a wise and noble simplicity, a directness and dignity, a certain naturalness and inevitability in their selection and use of words and metaphors, which makes you forget all about literary art, and feel as though you were listening to the authentic voice of Nature herself. It is as if Thought had grown vocal in them, and had expressed itself in a form beyond the reach of art. Nor, on the other hand, are they deposed from their pride of

place by long fits of prosaic commonplace. Wordsworth, for instance, will spin you out page after page of almost intolerable commonplace, in which you can discern no moment of inspiration, no spark of genius ; but at times, as in *Tintern Abbey* or the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, you find the note of distinction, of inevitability, on almost every word. And it is in virtue of these rare and noble achievements that he takes and retains his seat among the highest. Read him at his best, and though you may match him out of Coleridge, or Tennyson, or Browning, you can hardly excel him until you approach Shakespeare's supreme throne.

In the Bible, then, and in our own best poets, as indeed also in many of our great masters of prose, we may find many words so fitly and exquisitely spoken, so well set up on their wheels, that they are like golden fruit in a framework of natural silver ; and we may learn from them the power and the charm of a noble style.

2. I am sorely tempted to indulge in a few illustrations of the Proverb drawn from our poets ; but as I am preaching a sermon, not reading an essay, let me pass on to infer another lesson from the Orange-tree with its mingled fruits and blooms. We have seen that the force, the carrying and penetrating power, of a thought is wonderfully enhanced when it is set on wheels, when it is so felicitously expressed that it runs swiftly and smoothly to its mark. And we have only to generalize

that sentence in order to learn, that *all force becomes most forcible when it is smoothly and easily exerted*. There is a style in deeds as well as in words, and it is no less effective in the one than in the other. Whatever we may think while we are young and immature, it is not effort, strain, violence, which tell *in action* any more than in language, but gentleness, calmness, a gracious mastery and smiling ease. Suave musical tones are more penetrating, and more commanding, than "sounds of fury" which may signify nothing but a lost temper or a failing heart. The gentle light is a thousandfold more potent and more fruitful than the blazing blaring lightning. The stronger you are the less you need to push and strike; a mere touch, a gesture, or even a glance, will suffice. And the wiser you are the less passionate, the less vehement, the less overbearing you will be. A familiar saying reminds us that we may "have all the nodosities," all the gnarls and knots, "of the oak, without its strength," and go through "all the contortions of the Sibyl without her inspiration." A man who is sure of his cause, and sure of himself, need not be, and as a rule is not, loud, passionate, domineering. Why should he give way to excitement when he has only to speak and all objections will be answered, only to move and every obstacle will yield? It is not the broad strong wheel which makes the noise, but the petulant little pebbles which crack and explode under it. Great forces

are calm and gentle, because they are irresistible ; and no force is ever so impressive as when we see it moving smoothly and silently to its end. The iron hand habitually wears a velvet glove. It is the little brook which fumes, and wrestles, and—I had almost said—swears, as it rushes through the rocks ; the broad full river glides gently and swiftly along, because it is of a volume to sweep away, without effort, any obstruction it may encounter. And there is many a mountain cataract which makes a more surprising uproar than the falls of Niagara, in which it would be lost. Calmness, composure, gentleness, is a sign of strength.

3. But, here again, I can imagine some of you, but I hope not many, may be wondering that I should occupy your time with lessons such as these, even though you admit that they spring naturally from my text. "The first lesson," you may say, "was a mere literary criticism ; and the second is merely a criticism of human life. What have we to do with these in Church?"

I do not in the least agree with you, though I will not now contest the point, or argue that whatever brings out the meaning of any Scripture, or tends to improve either human speech or human life, is a fit theme for the pulpit. For these two lessons are only intended to introduce a third, the pertinence of which I think you will all admit. For our third and last lesson is that, if all force is most forcible when gently and smoothly exerted, then *Religion*,

the sublimest of all forces, *is most potent when it is clothed with grace* ; that a genial and friendly godliness is like the ruddy fruit of the Orange-tree encircled and set off by its wealth of white odorous blooms.

Too many of us forget that Religion, like the tree which stood in the midst of Paradise, should be "pleasant to the eye" as well as "good for food." There was much that was admirable in the Puritan conception of religion—in its sincerity, its purity, its reverence for the Divine Will, its devotion to the chief end of man, and even in its disdain for the fashions of the depraved world around it. But though its heart was sound and pure, its face wore a frown. By its severity, its fierceness, its lack of a large and genial humanity, its censoriousness and gloom, it rendered religion offensive and even repulsive,—as was proved by the national revolt against it when sword and sceptre fell from Cromwell's hand. The wiser sort of Puritan indeed, whether laymen or divines, were not responsible for the faults of Puritanism, and its failure. They cultivated music ; they loved poetry ; they valued culture and scholarship ; they cherished all forms of quiet innocent mirth ; and, with St. Paul, they held Clarity to be the greatest of Christian virtues. But the commoner sort of Puritan, as was natural perhaps in an age so licentious and corrupt, were austere, censorious, fierce, inhuman, and condemned all that made human life bright, jocund, attractive, all the

arts that refine human manners, all the courtesies that render human intercourse easy and gentle ; while many of them grew utterly sullen and fanatical, and some were even tainted by that hypocrisy which flickers only over the *grave* of virtue and religion.

As we look back, it is easy for us to condemn them, and to condemn them even beyond their deserts, because we make no allowance for the cruel, depraved, and fanatical spirit of the age in which they lived. Place Cromwell, for example, *where he stood*, between Charles I. and Charles II., between the fanatic of authority and the fanatic of pleasure, between the tyrant and the *roué* ; and it is not the Puritan governor of England for whom we need frame an apology. Forgetting what they had to suffer, and what they had to withstand, it is easy for us, I say, to condemn the Puritans beyond their deserts, even though we ourselves should be only wearing the Puritanic *rue* "with a difference," and a difference due not so much to our personal qualities as to the influence of our age. For, in many of us, Religion still wears a sour and forbidding face. Do we not all know men, and good men, who are more apt to frown than to smile, more ready to differ and to censure than to counsel and co-operate, and who often condemn wrong itself in a tone as wrong? "Apples of gold" they may be ; but assuredly they are not set in any becoming framework of silver. *They*, too, suspect beauty, culture, scholarship,

mirth, and even devotion to the service of God and man if it take any form other than that which they approve and prefer. There is nothing graceful, and not much that is gracious, in the form and manner of their godliness. They do not render religion attractive. They do not win, or invite, men to Christ by the daily beauty of their life.

Let us, then, learn a lesson from the Orange-tree, and the greatest lesson of all, the lesson of Charity. Let us make it our aim, not only to bring forth fruit unto God, but to enhance its beauty by the manner in which we offer and present it; not only to let men *see* our good works, but *so* see them—see such a beautiful, genial, and friendly spirit in them—that they also may glorify our Father who is in heaven. Nay, let us be charitable even to the uncharitable, and meet their censures in a spirit so good-tempered and gracious that they may be constrained to respond to it and share it. In a word, “may *the grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.”

XII.

THE MAN WHO WAS BORN BLIND.

I.—THE FUNCTION OF EVIL.

“And as he passed by he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”—JOHN ix. 1-3.

WHAT a teacher was Christ! Not only is it true that “no man ever spake like him;” but his very silence often suggested more than most men’s words, and his looks were more eloquent than speech. More than once we are told of a certain raised look He had, a mysterious and elevated look, seeing which his disciples were “amazed, and following him,” as He strode on wrapt in thought, “they feared.” And here, we are told, that as He came out of the temple, He paused before a man who had been blind from his birth, paused and *gazed upon* him, gazed upon him so intently and pitifully that, though He uttered no word, and dropped no coin into the imploring palm, his mere look set the disciples

thinking, and wondering, and asking themselves questions too deep for them to answer.

It is instructive to mark the turn their thoughts took ; for it shews how much these simple peasants and fishermen had gained by communion with Christ that, instead of falling into village or provincial gossip about the man before them, their minds rise at once to the ethical problem which his lot presents, and hunt after the cause of his calamity. They do not even ask what there was in this more than in the other beggars at the Temple gate that Christ should single him out ; nor do they discuss the probability of a miracle being wrought upon him, or beg Christ to work one. No doubt each of the disciples was affected by the spectacle in his own way, and revealed his personal bent by the way in which he regarded it. A German commentator (Pfenniger) indeed ventures to imagine and to report the conversation which took place between Iscariot and Thomas, John and Peter. But, whatever characteristic turn their thoughts may have taken, they are all busied with the moral aspects of the problem, and want to know how they are to think of it ; they want to reach a conception of it which will fit in with what they already know of God and of his dealings with men.

This much they had already learned of Christ—to lift their thoughts to that high moral plane on which his mind habitually dwelt and moved. Instead of vulgar

peasants who gossip over the details of a neighbour's misfortune, they are thoughtful students of human life, bent on solving its problems, on reaching the secret Divine order which runs through its confusions, on mastering "the plan" of that "mighty maze" in which we too often walk with careless feet. And hence they supply us with a test which we may usefully apply to our own character and conduct. How do *we* regard human life? what thoughts does *our* neighbour's story or misfortune breed within us? Have we learned to look on human life with *pensive*, i.e., with thoughtful, eyes, to study it, and to ask the great Teacher, so often as we are perplexed, what it means, what it teaches, what it reveals of the will, and of "the end, of the Lord"? If we are his disciples and have learned of Him, we should have a quick and tender sympathy in our neighbour's pain, or loss, or shame, which makes us feel it as though it were our own, which compels us to brood over it as he does or ought, and to search for some disclosure of God's mind and will.

Now if we join the group of Disciples in this spirit, and gaze with them on the blind man, we shall not be overmuch taken up with the curious questions which the scene, or the record of the scene, suggests. We shall glance at them, if we must glance at them, as quickly as we may, and press on to the fine hope for humanity implied in our Lord's answer to the question of his

disciples. He has something to say to us on *the function of evil*, on the part it plays, and is intended to play, in human life : and this will be the first thing with us, first in importance if not in order. For if we can get a little light from Him on the mystery of our overshadowed and confused existence, that, surely, will be far more welcome to us than any discussion of the singular question which prompted his words.

1. The question of the Disciples, except as shewing that it was the ethical problem of the blind man's lot which occupied their minds, is of little worth or interest to us, and is indeed very clumsily framed. When they ask, "Did this man's *parents* sin that he was born blind?" we can go with them to a certain extent ; for, though we do not hold, as probably they did, that every infirmity, defect, loss, is the direct result of some specific sin, we do believe in the transmission of hereditary qualities and defects ; we do believe that the iniquities of the fathers are visited on their children, even to the third or the fourth generation. But, as we see that children inherit much that is good from their parents as well as much that is evil, we argue that they must take their inheritance as a whole, and not complain of the debts with which it is burdened, unless they would prefer to lose all the aids and advantages they derive from those who went before them, and to begin life from the very beginning for themselves, with no one to

love, to care for and cherish them, no home to shelter them, no tools to work with, no roads to travel by, no books to read, no knowledge save such as they can acquire for themselves.

But when the Disciples go on to ask, "Did *this man* sin that he was born blind," we do listen with some amazement. "Blind from his birth," we say, "how could he sin before he was born?" And as we listen for a reply, the Commentators gather round us and offer many solutions of our perplexity. "The man may have sinned, as Esau and Jacob did," says Dr. Lightfoot, "in his mother's womb." "Nay," cries Tholuck, "God *foresaw* that he would sin heinously after he was born." "What need is there," asks Stier, for these fanciful and incredible hypotheses? The question is clear enough if you read it thus: "Did this man sin, or, *as that is out of the case*, did his parents sin, that he was born blind?" "Nay," exclaims Bishop Pearce, "you must read it thus: Which did sin? This man, that he *is* blind, or his parents, that he was *born* blind?" But here a whole chorus of more modern critics breaks in with, "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider the conception of life which the ancients held. Egyptians, Hindoos, Persians, Greeks, all held the eternity, as well as the immortality, of the soul; all believed that men had lived before they came into the world as certainly as that they would live after they went out of it. They

believed that the conditions men occupy here are determined by their conduct in a previous state, just as their conditions hereafter will be determined by their conduct in the present state. The Jews learned much from Egypt, much from Persia, much from Greece ; and no doubt they accepted this doctrine of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls. What the Disciples meant by their question was : Did the man, before he was born on earth, while he was in a previous stage of being, sin so heinously that, as a punishment for his sins, he was born blind ? ”

This last interpretation sounds so reasonable that we should gladly embrace it but for one weighty fact :—the Jews did *not* believe in metempsychosis. Strange as it is that this doctrine of a previous life did not come to them from Egypt, or Persia, or Greece, we know that it did not come to them either as an article of faith, or even as a popular superstition. We have it on the highest authority—that of Dr. Deutsch for one—that there is not the slightest trace of it in their writings till ten centuries after this question was asked. We can only conclude, therefore, that the Disciples, who were not infallible, asked their question hastily and confusedly, and therefore clumsily, and did not mean all they said ; or that they either forgot, or did not reflect, that the man was blind when he was born, even while they acknowledged it.

Neither our Lord nor his disciples spoke to each other with scientific and grammatical precision, but simply, colloquially, as a man talketh with his friend. Nor is anything more dangerous and misleading than a merely logical and precise exposition of the letter of Scripture. Our Lord Himself did not always mean what He said, if at least we are to insist on the logical contents of his words. When He answered the question of his disciples, He said: "*Neither did this man sin, nor his parents.*" Take these words literally, and they mean that at least three members of the human race besides Himself—the blind man, his father, and his mother, were immaculate, free from any stain of sin! We must use our judgment as we read, taking the words in their sense and spirit, not in the letter merely. Using our judgment, we know that our Lord did not mean to affirm either that this man or that his parents had never sinned, but that, neither his sin, nor that of his parents, was the final cause of his blindness. And in like manner, if we use our judgment, we know that the disciples could not have meant exactly what *they* said. All they meant was probably: "*Somebody* is to blame for this man's blindness; who is it? *Somebody* must have sinned; who was it?"

But enough, and more than enough, of a difficulty which, if men were wise, would never have been raised. Let us get into a wider space, and breathe an ampler air.

2. If, then, we turn from the question of the Disciples to our Lord's reply, we see at once that He rebukes that judicial habit of thought which is by no means peculiar to the *first* disciples. In effect He says to them, and to us : " Do not be so ready with your censure. There is much in human life *you* cannot comprehend. And it is no part of your duty to pronounce verdicts even on what you do comprehend, or think you do. Why should you judge another man's servants? To their own master let them stand or fall."

But there is teaching, as well as rebuke, in our Lord's reply, wisdom as well as charity.

(1) He corrects and enlarges the thoughts of the Disciples. He teaches them that, while all pain and calamity are the results of sin, yet the pain or infirmity of this man or that may not be attributable to any specific sin of his own, or of those who are most responsible for him. He implies that the effects of sin ray out subtly and mysteriously, so that we cannot always trace them back to their cause ; so that we offend against truth, as well as charity, if we take every calamity as the visitation of an offended God, every loss as a judgment, if we pride ourselves on telling for what sin it was that one man is diseased, and another bereaved, and another reduced from wealth to poverty.

And do we not all need to lay this truth to heart ? Almost every man is apt to call his own troubles *acci-*

dents, and his neighbour's *judgments*. If any one of our neighbours suffers, and especially if he suffers in some signal way, we can generally lay our finger on the very sin for which he suffers ; or, if we doubt whether we have hit the real blot, we are only puzzled because we know of so many sins any one of which would be a sufficient warrant for the pain or loss inflicted upon him : while if we ourselves are called to suffer we can find no sufficient reason for the pain or loss inflicted on us. The better rule, the more Christian rule, would be to judge ourselves, since we may easily know much evil of ourselves, and to leave our neighbours unjudged, since we know so little of them ; nay, to run to their help, and to give them what succour and comfort we can. The blind man's blindness had nothing to do with his sins, or with those of his parents, though the Disciples were so ready to assume that it had. And our neighbour's infirmities, losses, troubles, may have nothing to do with his sins, or with those of his kinsfolk, though we shake our head at him and assume that he has only got what he deserved. They may be a discipline of perfection, and not a punishment of guilt.

Let us not be so sure, then, that the calamities which befall our neighbours are God's judgments on their sins ; let us not be so hard on them even if they are. There are mysteries in every human life which we cannot fathom,—inherited defects of will and taints of blood,

conspiracies of opportunity and desire, predispositions and temptations the strength of which we have not felt or cannot measure. Whatever will help us to think humbly of ourselves, and charitably of our neighbours, we may safely cherish. If *we* are afflicted, bereaved, compassed with infirmity, we do well to ask for what good end, for the correction of what evil bias or habit, this evil has befallen us: but we do equally well if, when our neighbours suffer, we remember how often the maimed, and weak, and afflicted are not sinners above other men; if we refuse to judge them although, and because, we judge ourselves.

(2) But, again. If this man was not born blind as a punishment for sin, for what was this terrible deprivation inflicted on him? The Lord Jesus replies—and here lies our great lesson: “The man was born blind *that the works of God might be made manifest in him.*” For in this reply there lies a great light of hope for us, and for all men, as I will try to shew you.

How, then, were the works of God made manifest in this man? Does our Lord mean that the man was born blind, and kept blind for many years, in order that *He* might work a miracle upon him? in order that both *He*, and God through *Him*, might get a little glory by the man’s cure?

He means nothing so selfish and so base. *That* is not the function of evil in this world, although good

men often talk as if it were. We, with myriads more, are not tempted, smitten, afflicted, tormented, in order that He who sits in heaven may win an honour upon us such as a tyrant might covet; in order that we should praise Him because we fear Him, and beg Him to save us because we dread danger and pain, and thank Him for saving us because we are glad to be safe. God is not exploiting the human race, as a victorious soldier without conscience might do, to make Himself a name and a fame in the earth. What Christ means is that God permitted blindness to come on this man from the womb in order that He might take occasion by it to open his eyes, not only on the beautiful world of Nature, but also on the sacred truths and realities of the spiritual and eternal world, and so prove it to be the work of God to give light to all who sit in darkness. The man was exposed to this sad deprivation for a time in order that he might see the truths which the blind staring Pharisees could not see, and be saved from the supreme evils both of life and of death. *This* is the meaning and function of evil as Christ interprets it. It is a dark cloud which is to be suffused with heavenly light. It is a deprivation from which we are not only to be recovered, but through which we are to rise into a good larger, deeper, and more enduring, than we could otherwise attain. Had this man had the use of his eyes, he might have been blind for ever. *Blind from his birth,

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his eyes are for ever open on a fairer world than this.

This, I repeat, is the function and purpose of evil, and of all that it breeds. God permits us to suffer from it in order that He may manifest his works to us more clearly, more truly, and on a larger scale. Had the blind man not been blind, he might never have seen "the works of God." Had he not been blind, he might never have seen Christ. Had he not been compelled by his blindness to brood over himself and the true meaning of life, he might have met Christ, as thousands did meet Him, with "eyes that saw not," instead of recognizing in Him the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Was it not worth his while to sit in darkness until he was "of age" in order that the very first face he saw should be the Face from which there shone all the glory of God? If through weakness he gained the power of an endless life, if through darkness he was prepared to recognize and welcome "the Light of the world" and "the Life of men," was it not well that he should pass through darkness and weakness into life and light?

"Bring forth the blind that have eyes!" cried the ancient prophet. And, really, all the blind men we meet in the Gospel story seem to have had eyes, and eyes which they had gained by their blindness, eyes to behold the works and the glory of God in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Now this conception of the meaning and function of

evil—that it is intended to qualify us for ultimate and greater good—is one round which our thoughts often play. Reason points to it, though with a trembling and uncertain finger. We argue that as, on the whole, life prevails over death, good over evil, in the natural world and in the human story, evil, with its manifold results of pain, may be designed to arouse our attention to the Divine order, to the benign end to which all things are to round at the last. Just as “we take no note of time but by its loss,” so also we forget, or might forget, the calm and bounty of Nature but for the storms that sweep over it. We should not observe that health is the rule, or feel how good and sweet it is, save for the sicknesses which deprive us of it and teach us to value it at its worth. We should not notice that, on the whole, God makes human life tranquil and happy and prosperous, were He not at times to call on us to suffer pain and loss. We should not know the worth of love, or how much love is lavished on us, if we never lost those who love us. We should not realize the good there is in our lives, if the smooth current of our lives was never vexed with ill winds. Evil is only the occasional discord which makes us sensible of the prevailing harmony and renders it richer and fuller. It is only the interruption which makes us conscious of the even flow of our days. It is only as the task which develops our strength, the danger which endears our safety.

So at least we reason and persuade ourselves in our happier moods. But when, by much labour of thought, we have reached our conclusion and set ourselves to rest in it, how soon, and how terribly, is it shaken ! how many facts tell, or seem to tell, against it ! how uncertain it grows ! how often we falter where we firmly trod, and at the best can only faintly trust so large a hope ! The truth is that, in all these attempts to argue out the meaning and function of evil, we handle things too wonderful for us. *We* cannot grasp all the facts of human life, and interpret them, and harmonize them. And, therefore, we cannot rest in our conclusion, however laboriously we have reached it, unless it is confirmed by Him who *can* grasp all the facts, and who sees "the future in the instant." But if He who sits on high, and sees the generations of men rise, and pass, and fall beneath his feet—if *He* will speak to us, if He will assure us that evil is but the dark avenue to greater good, that it is, as one of the Psalmists boldly puts it, but the bad dream of God which will vanish the moment He awakes ;¹ if He will assure us that all the infirmities and pains and calamities we endure are designed to usher in a fuller manifestation of his lovingkindness and truth, that they are but as the storms and frosts of winter which prepare for the rich and varied wealth of an eternal summer, then we can welcome frost and wind,

¹ See Volume III. page 163.

and rain and storm ; we can glory in tribulation also : for the joy set before us we are content to bear whatever discipline He may send.

And here lies the immense value of our Lord's words. For, here, He does assure us that the ills we suffer are sent in order that the works of God may be made manifest in us and to us. He does assure us that we shall rise through darkness and weakness into spiritual health, vision, perfection ; that the winter of our discontent shall be made glorious summer by the Sun of Righteousness. We say, we try to persuade ourselves, that God is still evolving a soul of good from all things ill ; that He will make us glad according to the years in which He has afflicted us ; that if we sow in tears, we shall reap in joy. But, even as we say it, our lips quiver, our speech falters, our hearts misgive us : for *we* cannot grasp all the days of time, nor see "the *end* of the Lord," nor even so much as know what to-morrow will bring forth. *But Christ can and does.* He is of the council of the Almighty. He knows the mind of the Lord. All the facts of human life are naked and open to Him. All the years of time are beneath his eye. And, therefore, when He tells us that good will overcome evil in the end, and life conquer death, and that all the afflictions of time will work out for us an eternal weight of glory, and that God permits evil in many forms to come upon us only that He may thereafter

more fully reveal his works to us, then we can rest in our conclusion; nay, better still, we can rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, because we know, on the best authority, that He who doeth all things well is causing all things to work together for our good.

XIII.

THE MAN WHO WAS BORN BLIND.

II.—THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

“I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day ; the night cometh when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”—JOHN ix. 4, 5.

THESE verses are not very lucid, I think, although they speak of the light and the day. Even if we eke out their meaning with the verse which precedes them, the connections of thought are not clear and obvious. We hear of the works of God, and of a day within which they must be done ; we hear of the light of the world, and of a night in which it must be eclipsed : but the words leave only a dim impression on our minds, and even this dim impression grows doubtful to us as we consider it. “Has there ever been a night,” we ask, “in which Christ could not and did not work ? Has He not been doing the works of God from the beginning, and will He not do them to the end ? Is He the Light of the World only “so long as” He is in the world ?

is He not also its Light now that He has left the world and risen above it? does He not shine down upon it with redoubled force from the heaven into which He rose, in which He dwells?"

For all so simple as they sound, then, these words are by no means easy to interpret. The passage is composed of plain Saxon words of one syllable, and yet their meaning is not plain. Perhaps the history of the passage will go far to explain it. Let us see.

On a certain Sabbath day the Lord Jesus came into the temple, probably toward the time of afternoon service. The people flocked round Him to hear what He would say. He had compassion on the multitude, and spake the divine discourse recorded in Chapter viii., of which the opening words are, "*I am the light of the world.*" As He spake, "many believed" on Him; but the Jews, *i.e.*, the official Jews, were so incensed by his words that they took up stones to cast at Him, so that He was fain to hide Himself from them and to leave the temple.

Many believed on Him because of the words He spake. But even after the most moving and impressive discourse "there is a sense of vacancy in the heart. We feel as if we were out of communion with the business and the misery of the world," as if there were a great gulf between the pure and lofty thoughts by which we have been moved and the vulgar realities of our daily

life. We want to see these thoughts put to the test, to see them reduced to practice. Not till the word has been clothed in the loveliness of perfect deeds does it take full effect upon us. Christ might have *said* "I am the light of the world" for ever, and have won little faith or reverence save from those whose hearts were in some measure akin to his own; but if He who said that He was the Light of all men gave light to even one man, *that* man would believe his word, and many more, who were not to be reached by words alone, would be disposed to believe it.

Christ does illustrate his word by a deed. As He passes out of the temple, He sees a man blind from his birth among the throng of those who sat and begged at the gate. He pauses, and looks at the man. His disciples also pause and look; and as they look they begin to consider for what cause this calamity had come upon him. They assume that the cause must be sin, the man's own sin, or that of his parents. Christ teaches them to think more accurately and more largely. Just as He had said of the mortal disease of Lazarus, "This sickness is not unto death, *but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby,*" so He says of the blind man's infirmity, "Neither for his own sin, nor for that of his parents, was this man born blind, *but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*" Just as by the grave of Lazarus Christ proved Himself to be

"the Resurrection and the Life" of all men, by raising one dead man to life, so He now proves Himself "the Light" of all men, by giving light to one who sat in darkness.

This was the deed in which He clothed and vindicated his word. This was the work by which He proved Himself to be "the Light indeed." For in this single case Christ revealed a general law. He taught us, as I shewed you last Sunday, what God's purpose is in permitting evil and imperfection to come on men. Any one of God's works reveals the law of his working—his method, his purpose and aim. And, therefore, this work throws light on all similar and related cases. It teaches us the true function of evil. It brings us the welcome assurance that God uses the very evil He hates for our greater good; that even through this dark cloud He causes the beams of his righteousness and mercy to shine.

1. It is here, at this point of the story, that my text comes in. Christ is about to "make manifest the works of God;" to shew, in one crucial instance, what God is always doing for men through the miseries they endure. And as the purpose rises on his mind, he is conscious that *to manifest the works of God* is his sole and constant mission on the earth, and says, "I *must* work the works of Him that sent me." A sacred necessity was upon Him. He did not choose his own

way, nor his own tasks. They were appointed for Him. To this end had He come into the world, that He might shew and declare the Father, that He might reveal the mind and will of God, so reveal them as to convince men of the absolute goodness of his will, and that his mind was a light in which there was no darkness nor shadow cast by turning.

The work of Christ, therefore, was, on his own shewing, to *manifest* the works of God, to make them apparent and impressive. According to his own conception of his mission, He was to do plainly and visibly what God is always doing in a more secret and reserved way. It was his task to draw aside the veil of secondary causes and general laws behind which God and his working are commonly hidden from our eyes, and to shew, in one superb demonstration, what God is for ever doing for our welfare and redemption.

Now there are few thoughts, even in the New Testament itself, of graver moment or happier significance than this. It is *full* of light and comfort when once we master it. Take an illustration of it, then. There are certain gases—oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen—each of which, taken singly, is fatal to human life ; and yet these very gases, variously combined, are essential to human life. Blended in one proportion, they make the air we breathe ; blended in another proportion, they make the water we drink. For the most part we breathe

the pure air and drink the living water without any thought of the Eternal Wisdom and Goodness which supply these gases in due proportion, and which cunningly blend elements, each of which is by itself fatal to life, into the very necessities of life. This constant marvel, which transcends all miracles, is concealed from us by the very constancy of the laws or methods by which it is produced. But one day a man of science visits us. He brings these gases with him, and shews us how fatal they are, in their separate forms, to animal life. He tells us in what proportions they must be combined in order to sustain the life they would else destroy. He makes his experiments, and from a due intermixture of these gases he produces an air we can breathe, precipitates a water we can drink. In short, *he makes manifest to us the works of God*, the works that God is always doing, and by which the whole fabric of Nature is redeemed, moment by moment, from destruction.

In like manner Christ came to manifest the works of God in a region higher than that of physical life, in the moral and spiritual order of the universe. From the beginning God has been ordering human life, so ordering and combining elements in it, which else were fatal, as to compel them to minister to human welfare. But, for the most part, though men are conscious of a certain discipline in the pain and sorrow and loss by which their sins and faults are corrected, and therefore of a certain

benefit which they derive from them ; though they admit that on the whole their life is wisely ordered, they do not see *who* it is that is for ever evolving good from ill, or that He is redeeming them from the power and bondage of evil by the miseries of their self-induced captivity. Therefore Christ came and dwelt among us. He came to manifest the constant invariable will and purpose of God ; to shew us, as in a marvellous series of experiments, who it is that so blends all the moral components of our life as to make it an advance from evil, through pain, to good, a progress from imperfection to perfection. We see Christ healing men of their sicknesses, feeding them with bread, gladdening them with wine ; we see Him encountering all that was evil in the men around Him with a patient goodness, and overcoming it, so that the most sinful and despised outcasts are drawn to Him and his salvation ; we see Him dying to give us life, and rising from the dead that we may have life still more abundantly. And in all this we are to discern, not the grace of Christ alone, but also the grace of the Father who sent Him ; we are to behold, not simply a few isolated acts of mercy, but, in those acts, the proof and illustration of an eternal Mercy, of a Loving-kindness ever at work for our redemption. For a few brief months Christ did "the works of Him that sent" Him, did them visibly, plainly, so that men could not fail to see them, in order that we might learn once for all what

God's works are, and have been, and will be, through all the ages of time, and be sure that God *is* what Christ *was*, and is doing what Christ did. He shewed us the Father, and made his works manifest.

How reasonable and welcome a light this conception of our Lord's mission casts on the miracles He wrought, the more reflective of you will see at a glance. The Power that upholds Nature, and works through it, can be no part of nature, must be supernatural. And if Christ came to reveal this supernatural Power to us, to make its works *manifest*, does not reason itself demand that He should do supernatural works? How else could He "make manifest" the supernatural power of God?

But, to the heart, this conception, Christ's own conception of his own mission, speaks even more potently than to the reason. For if God is doing for us now, and always, exactly what Christ did for the infirm, the sinful, the lost and miserable, whom He met in Galilee and Judea; if He only "made manifest" the constant works of his Father, which of us may not hope to find in God a mercy patient of all our offences, strong enough to deliver us from all our sins, liberal enough to supply all our wants? If God will treat *us* as the man Christ Jesus treated the diseased and guilty outcasts on whom He laid his kindly hands, sending them from Him cured and saved, who need despair whether of himself or of his neighbours? God *will* treat us thus; for in shewing pity

to the sick and sinful Christ was simply manifesting the works of God.

2. But there is a second thought in this passage which needs to be made clear. He who said, "I must work the works of him that sent me," added, "*while it is day,*" and explained, "*for the night cometh in which no man can work : so long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*"

The main flow of thought in these words is clear enough. For, obviously, He who both works the works of God and makes them manifest must be the Light of the world, since He enables men to see the very facts and truths they most need to know.

Nor are the words difficult in themselves. We may easily catch and follow their meaning. For it was probably late in the afternoon when Jesus closed his discourse in the temple. And as He stood at the gate, looking at the blind man, the sinking sun would naturally suggest that another day's toil was nearly over, and lead Him to compare his whole life on earth to a day that must soon close. In the temple the Jews had taken up stones to stone Him. And He foresaw that before long they would have their way, that they would compass the death they had already attempted. Nay, He knew that He could not make the works of God manifest, that He could not shew forth the fulness of the divine redeeming Love, except as He tasted death for every man, and by

death conquered for us, as well as for Himself, him that had the power of death. He knew that his time on earth was short, that the day would soon be over : and hence He said, " I must work the works of Him that sent me," —*must*, whatever the hazard to which it exposes me. The day will soon end ; and no faithful worker will cease from his task till the night fall. So long as I am in the world I must prove myself the Light of the world ; I must shine ; and, by shining, make the works of God manifest.

The words are simple enough, and the thought they express is also simple, natural, and pathetic. And, though two figures are employed, there is no confusion of figures to bewilder us. Christ says that He was *the Light* of the world, and that He *worked* in the world of which He was the light. But what more efficient and untiring worker is there on any day than the Sun which makes and rules the day ? His light and heat travel over the whole earth, quickening and nourishing innumerable forms of life and beauty. Hence there is no incongruity in our Lord's comparing Himself at once to the sun which gives light to all the world and to the labourer who toils on till the day is done. The sun is a labourer. Christ was both a labourer and a light, a labourer *because* He was a light.

What difficulty there is in the passage springs, not from its words or figures, but from the questions which

the words suggest. As we consider them, we cannot but ask : " Did Christ, the Worker, cease to work, when his day on earth was spent ? Did Christ, the Sun, cease to shine when He left the world ? Is it not true, rather, that He never worked to such purpose as in and after the night of his death ? that He never shone with such quickening heat as when He left the world, and rose to heaven, and shed down his Spirit on the waiting and expectant Church ? " We know how such questions must be answered. We know that there never was a night in which Christ could not and did not work ; and that He is still the Light of the world, though He is no longer in the world.

But if we look carefully at the phrases, " I must work while it is day," and, " The night cometh when no man can work," are we bound to take them as meaning that Christ was about to exchange day for a night in which He could do no manner of work ? May we not, rather, take them as meaning that no man, who has not done the work of the day *during the day*, can do *that* work at night ? Other men may work on other days ; on other days he himself may do other works. But the work of the day must be done in the day : he who fails to do it then cannot do it afterward. Opportunities have gone that can never be recalled ; tasks have been neglected which will never come into his hands again. And, therefore, so long as the Light of the world was in the world,

his work for the day was to give light ; and that day's work must be done *then*. No opportunity, no such opportunity as this at the temple gate, must be let slip.

This is one sense in which we may interpret our Lord's words. We may take them to mean, not that all work would be impossible when the night of death fell, but only that the work proper to his day on earth must be done while He was on the earth. And this interpretation is confirmed as we consider the figures He employs. He compares Himself to the Sun. But is the sun put out when the night comes ? No, all that happens is that the world turns from the sun. The light is not obscured or lessened in volume, much less extinguished. It shines on with unabated force, though the averted face of the earth is no longer illumined by its rays. When the night comes, is *all* the earth dark ? No, only half the earth ; the sun quits one hemisphere to shine upon the other. When the night comes, does the sun cease to work even on the hemisphere it has left ? No, the light and heat which it has poured down during the day are treasured in the earth, which remains the warmer because the sun has shone upon it, and in the trees and flowers, which grow faster by night than by day. And from all these analogies we may infer that when Christ, the Light of the world, left the world, He rose on other and larger spheres, turned his face on other worlds and systems ; we may infer that when He does not shine on one part

of the earth, it is that He may visit other parts—leaving Judea for Greece, for Italy, for England ; and that even when He does not shine in full-orbed splendour on us, the influences of his loving-kindness and truth may remain with us, to make us fruitful in good works. No, Christ did not cease to labour when He was shrouded in the night of death. He went and preached to the spirits in prison. He ascended into heaven, and poured down the gifts of his Spirit on the very men who, with lawless hands, had slain their Lord and Christ. And to this day He still works and shines, and is still redeeming men from their thralldom to evil into the freedom and peace of an obedient and holy life.

There is a great wealth of ethical suggestion in my text when once we understand it ; but let us take only its simplest and most obvious lesson :—*The work of the day must be done in the day.* To Christ it was impossible to neglect any opportunity of manifesting the mercy and compassion of God, or to use any such opportunity without remembering that this was the great work of his life. The Jews, who had sought to stone Him, were still raging against Him in the courts and colonnades of the temple. He has just escaped from their hands. At any moment they may come pouring through the gate in pursuit of Him. But there, on the steps leading up to the gate, lies a blind man, to whom He may manifest the will and work of God. The claim is imperative.

And He meets it as calmly, as graciously, as if no danger were near.

Would that *we* could carry about with us this constant and happy sense of duty ! It was no burden to Christ ; it was his strength : for as He went about his Father's business He knew that no enemy could prevail against Him, nor " that fell sergeant, Death," arrest Him, until He had finished the work his Father had given Him to do. Why, then, should the sense of duty lie so heavily on us ? Why should it not be our strength and inspiration ?

Would that *we* could see in every opportunity of shewing mercy and doing kindness a part of the great and lifelong work assigned us, and feel that we dare not let it pass, since it will never come again ! As we recall the past, how many such irretrievable opportunities have we to grieve over as lost, and lost for ever ! When the work of our life comes to be summed up, how poor and imperfect will it be as compared with what it might have been had we never let occasion slip !

Let us take the warning, then. The work of the day must be done *in the day*. The night cometh in which we can do no part of the work that ought to have been done in the day of life ; the night on which we must part with the money we did not use for the good or relief of our fellows, and the business in which we did not glorify God by our integrity and our generous consideration for

others, and the home in which our example did not always tell for good, and the Church which we did little to serve perhaps, or little as compared with what we should like to remember then. For some of us the clock of time has already given its warning click, and the hour will soon strike : while to none of us can the hour be very distant in which we shall wish that, while we were in the world, we had done more and better in it and for it. Doubtless even the night of death will bring us tasks of its own ; but it will not bring back the tasks and opportunities we neglected during the day. Nor shall we be so well prepared for a faithful and happy discharge of the tasks that await us in death and beyond it as we should have been had we discharged the tasks of life with a constant fidelity. Let us be up and doing, then. Let us redeem the time that is left. So long as we are in the world let us labour to serve and bless the world, ever working the works of Him that sent us ; that so when the night falls and our work is over, we may hear the Master's " Well done," and enter into the joy of our Lord.

XIV.

THE MAN WHO WAS BORN BLIND.

III.—THE CURE OF THE BLIND MAN.

“When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.”—JOHN ix. 6, 7.

TRADITION reports that an Eastern prince came from afar to King Solomon, to ask of him a word, or maxim, that would make him strong in misfortune and humble in prosperity ; and that Solomon the Wise gave him this maxim : “ *Even this also will pass away.* ” And, indeed, he who is heartily persuaded that even the darkest day of adversity must come to an end, and that even the brightest sun of prosperity must set, may well be strong in patience and in humility. But there are some calamities so severe, and apparently so hopeless, that, to these, Solomon’s maxim seems inapplicable. If, for example, any one had said to the man who was

blind from his birth, "Be patient, Sir, for even this calamity will pass away," it is by no means likely that *he* would have derived much comfort from the saying. And yet, through the grace of Christ, even this apparently hopeless misfortune did pass away, and he "came seeing" who before was blind.

Nay, more : our Lord Himself assures us that his case is not an exception to the rule—that even the worst miseries of time will come to an end—but an illustration of it. He assures us that calamity of every kind falls on men, not simply because they have sinned, but also that the works of God should be "made manifest in them," that through their very calamities they may rise into a clearer perception of God's will, and a happier participation of his goodness. He teaches us that God is for ever doing invisibly what He Himself did visibly while He was on earth, giving eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf, and feet to the lame, and life to the dead : He teaches, in short, that in the whole ministry of his gracious and redeeming life He was simply doing the works of Him that sent Him, simply shewing men what God is always doing in secret for their welfare and redemption.

That the mission of Christ was to declare the Father and to manifest his works was our theme last Sunday morning. And now we meet a new illustration of this theme as we proceed to consider the means by which Christ gave the blind man sight. Here, once more, He

manifests the works of God. Here, too, He puts the blind man's faith to the test.

1. Let us, first, consider this manifestation of the works of God. When He would cure the blind man, Jesus mixes spittle and clay—or, generalizing the terms, He mixes water and earth—anoints the man's eyes, and bids him go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Now it is very obvious that no one of these means had in itself a sufficient virtue to cure a congenital blindness. Neither then, nor now, would a man born blind gain sight merely by having clay put on his sightless eyeballs and by washing in the sacred Spring. It was the power put forth by Christ, it was the volition of his gracious will, that gave the clay and the water their healing virtue. And by telling us that in infusing this virtue into the clay and the water He was doing the will of Him that sent Him and manifesting the works of God, Christ meant, of course, that it is God who is for ever healing men, not only by the medicinal virtues He infuses into air and water, and the vegetable and mineral products of the earth, but also by the gracious and curative volitions of his almighty will. What He means is that God is always doing invisibly what He then did before the eyes of men. Just as He elsewhere teaches us that men do not live by bread alone, but by the quickening and creative word of God, by the secret effluences of his living Will which come to us in and through the food we eat, so, here, He

teaches us that men are healed, not by drugs and medicine alone, but by the volitions of that Will which gives being and efficacy to all things.

According to Him, in short, we owe life and all that nourishes life, health and all that promotes or restores health, not merely to the natural processes of which Sciences takes account, but also to the Divine energy which works in and through them. And thus He compels us to choose between the two theories of Nature, the material and the spiritual, which have long divided the thoughts of men.

According to the material theory, Nature is simply a vast complex of physical forces acting on fixed and invariable laws. There is no Spirit informing and animating the universal frame. There is no God in Nature and above it, working through it, controlling, modifying, enforcing its laws. But no sooner do we carefully examine this theory than it instantly reveals the gravest and most surprising defects. Glibly as we talk of "causes" and "forces" and "laws," Science knows of no final and sufficient cause, no force which is more than an hypothesis, no law which has any power to assert itself. All it knows is certain sequences which reveal themselves invariably in the phenomena and course of Nature, and which seem *as if* some rule or law had been laid down which they are compelled to observe. But as to who, or what, laid down that law and enforces it, Science has no

word to say. It speaks, indeed, and, owing to the imperfection of human language, *must* speak of the force, or law, of gravitation in the inorganic universe, and speaks of it at times as if it were the cause of certain phenomena ; but question any man of Science, and he will tell you that it is not a true cause, but simply an hypothesis, a generalization, which best accounts for the facts which Science has observed. So, again, with the chemical laws of affinity and repulsion. These are not real forces or causes, they are simply certain modes or sequences in which the chemical phenomena present themselves to the human mind. So, too, the vital processes of the human frame seem to indicate the presence of a vital force which acts according to certain rules ; but no man has yet discovered this force, or can explain its origin, or even say in what it consists. Things happen *so*, is all that Science can say ; but *why* they happen so, or *who* or what it is that *makes them* happen so, are questions beyond its reach.

There are, indeed, men of science who assume that physical phenomena can have none but physical causes. But, so far as I can see, this assumption carries them beyond their proper province, and flies in the face of experience as well as of religion. Religion teaches us that *God* is immanent in Nature ; that in Him, and by Him, and for Him, all things consist ; that He is the first great Cause ; that it is his will which gives vitality

and efficacy to all the processes of Nature and of human life. And does not our experience, so far as it goes, confirm the teaching of religion? does it not prove that all the so-called forces and laws of Nature may be modified and controlled by a personal will? We do not enough consider the vast extent to which the volitions of man's will control and modify the course of Nature, what enormous and almost incredible changes they have produced and are still producing throughout the world. Left to itself, *i.e.*, left to the unchecked operation of Nature, England might have been a mere jungle, or forest, haunted by wild beasts. But for centuries the will of man has been at work upon it, gradually uprooting the herbs and trees which were of no service or of little service to the race, and replacing them with fruitful trees and a waving wealth of corn. The wild beasts, noxious to man, have been tamed or extirpated; breeds have been crossed and developed, till our modern horse, or ox, or sheep, or dog, is as superior to the original stock as a field of pedigree wheat to wild corn. Man has hewed and blasted the rocks, and compelled them to yield their treasures of stone for his service, and has burned the clay of the fields into bricks, that he might build houses and streets, palaces and temples. He has rifled the bowels of the earth of its hidden wealth of iron and coal, and turned them to the uses of industry in a thousand different forms. He has made the very elements his servants, and

the lightnings his messengers, compelling them to draw his loads, turn his looms, drive his ships, and convey his thoughts to the ends of the earth. Can any man survey this changed and wealthy England of ours, and mark how the will of man has modified and controlled the course of Nature over every inch of it, and say that material phenomena can have none but material causes; unless indeed he assume man's will to be itself material, —in which case the universal human consciousness rises in revolt against him? Can any one note in how many ways man has learned to rule Nature by submitting to her, and then affirm that almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, if there be such a God, cannot possibly be the central and final cause of all that exists? Does not reason, does not common sense, suggest that, if the puny will of man has done so much, the almighty will of God may have done infinitely more?

Nay, does not the assumption that it is the will of God which acts through all the phenomena of the universe, giving life to all that lives, giving efficiency and law to all the processes of the inorganic world, supply the very defect of which Science is conscious? Does it not supply that true cause, that real force, that vital energy, of which Science finds so many indications, but which it is nevertheless unable to discover?

Yes; to this conclusion must even science come at last. It will find the cause, the forces, the laws of

which it speaks in the will of God. It will see Him in Nature, the Source and Fountain of all being, of all life. So at least *we* must believe, if we accept Christ as our Teacher. For He affirms that in healing the blind man, as in all his works of mercy, He was but *making manifest* the works of God—doing publicly what God is always doing privily, declaring and demonstrating his Father to be the Maker, Controller, and Sustainer of all things, whether in heaven or on earth.

2. But let us turn to our second point, and mark how the blind man's faith was put to the test. He had heard what Christ said to the Disciples before He spake to *him*. He had heard, therefore, that Christ was about to work a work of God. He had heard that Christ was "the light of the world," and had probably inferred that Christ was about to prove Himself the Light of all men, by giving light to him. But Christ does not *straightway* give him light. He hints, indeed, that a cure was about to be wrought by anointing the blind eyes: even the "spittle" would convey a hope of cure, since human saliva was then accounted medicinal in many cases of blindness. And yet to daub the eyes with clay would seem more likely to cause blindness than to cure it. And no special medicinal value was attributed to the Pool of Siloam. To bid the blind man go, with clay plastered over his eyes, and wash it off in the spring that was called *Sent*, was therefore to put him to the

proof: it was to try whether he had confidence enough in Christ to do his bidding, even when He bade him use unlikely means for the recovery of his sight. We know very well that Christ could have opened his eyes with a word; and hence we are compelled to believe that He employed this singular and indirect method of healing in order to put the man to the test. And it speaks well for the blind man that he stood the test. He asked no such question, raised no such objection, as that of Naaman, the Syrian leper. He does as he is bid without hesitation, without reluctance.

And in this he sets us an example. For when we seek spiritual good at the hands of Christ, He often gives us some command, or imposes some condition, the meaning and value of which we do not discover till we have met the condition and obeyed the command. It would be easy to give many illustrations of this indirect method; but it would be hard to find a more pertinent illustration than one which is just now much in the thoughts of men. The first and great commandment of the Gospel, as well as of the Law, is: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." To almost every man the commandment commends itself as the sum and substance of practical religion. And many are saying just now: "What do we want with more than this? What do we want with theology? Why should we ask men

to believe what *we* believe about God, and Christ, and the immortality of the soul, and the state of retribution which lies beyond the grave? If they love God and man, is not that enough? Why, then, demand more of them? On this point we all agree. Were we to ask nothing more of our neighbours, we might all come into a sacred unity. But the very moment we bring forward theology, and demand belief in this doctrine or that, we divide them; they fly apart, and unity becomes impossible."

This is the tone taken by many good men just now, and which, I suppose, we are all tempted to take. Max Müller, for example, in a lecture on Christian Missions which he delivered in Westminster Abbey some years ago, affirmed that missionaries make a grave mistake when they preach the Gospel to the heathen, when they tell them that Christ came forth from the bosom of God to reveal the love of God to sinful men, to redeem them and bring them back to Him. "'True Christianity,' he said, 'lies not in our belief, but in our love—in our love of God, and in our love of man, founded on our love of God.' This rule of love would commend itself to men of goodwill in every land, whatever the creed they hold. Why, then, should we perplex and alienate them by demanding faith in Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world? Let us rather teach them that love to God and man is the substance of all true religion."

Now, it is impossible, I think, to listen to such words as these without a good deal of sympathy. For we too believe that the love of God and man is the essential substance of religion. And yet, obviously, this method of teaching religion was not Christ's method. His first demand of men was not love, but faith, or trust. The angels of the Advent announced the birth of a Saviour who should redeem men from their sins. And Christ demanded that men should believe Him to be that Saviour. "Believe on Me; believe that, seeing Me, ye see the Father; believe that God is what I am, as kind and merciful, as able to heal, as willing to forgive and save: believe that I do but shew you in my works what He is always doing for your welfare and redemption;"—this, as you know, was his constant claim, as it was also the claim which his disciples made for Him. And men did not always find it easy to meet the claim then, any more than they do now. *He* was by no means the kind of Saviour for whom they looked. It seemed unlikely, and even incredible, that God was in *Him*, reconciling the world unto Himself. Yet none the less He pressed the claim, and demanded faith of them rather than love.

Why? Simply, I suppose, because men would never have known what love was like but for Him, and their faith in Him. Had He come among us simply to *say* "Love God and man," and permitted men to put their

own interpretation on the word "love," would the world have hated Him as it did? To *that* message the world had listened with composure, and even with admiration, before He came, and had been little the better for it. It was because He shewed them what the love of God was like—how pure and holy it was, capable of inflicting any pain which would redeem men from their sins, and demanded of them a love like his own,—that the world hated Him and hung Him on a tree. He has put a new meaning into the old commandment. He has shewn us that the love of God will go all lengths and endure all pains to redeem us from sin to holiness. He has shewn us that to love God and man aright is to be willing to lay down life itself in order to obey the holy will of God and to serve our neighbour. And, therefore, He demands faith of us before He demands love—faith in the true love, faith that we may possess ourselves of the true love. We must believe in Him, believe in his love as at once a revelation of the love of God and the ideal and pattern of human love, before we can love either God or man as He would have us love them.

This is why He demands faith, faith in Him and in the God in Him, even before He demands love. And all history and experience shew his method to be the true one. Men have never yet been raised into goodness by the power of an ethical maxim, such as "Love

God and man" would be apart from all else that Christ taught ; but they have often been raised to goodness by the power of a simple and sincere faith in Him. *We* want to make the command, "Thou shalt love God and thy neighbour" the law of all human life. And, to some, it may seem an unlikely and roundabout way of reaching our end to teach that Christ came forth from the Father to shew the Father to us, to live our life as it ought to be lived, to die for our sins, to open heaven and the kingdom of heaven to us ; and to insist that men must believe all this before they can do his will. But how shall the Buddhist, who can hardly be said to believe in a personal God at all, or how can the Moham-medan, who hopes that God will reward his piety with a paradise of sensual pleasures, feel anything that we should think worthy of the name of "love," or frame any conception of God that will lift him out of his sensual addictions ?

Unlikely as it may seem, then, *faith*, faith in Christ as shewing God to us and making his works manifest, *is the way to love*,—to that love of God and man which is alone worthy of the name. Hence He demands faith of every one of us ; and once more He presses this demand on us. *We* must believe, if we are to be raised into the life of righteousness and charity. We must believe in Christ, believe in the God whom He reveals, believe that God is ever working through all the pro-

cesses of nature, all the changes of providence, all the gifts of his grace, for our good—to nourish, and heal, and save us. And if we sincerely believe in Him as the Fountain of all life and goodness, it will not be hard for us to love Him, or even to love the neighbour whom He loves, and for whose welfare, as for ours, He is ever at work.

XV.

*THE INEQUALITIES OF LIFE A WARRANT
OF IMMORTALITY.*

“Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ; or is thine eye evil because I am good ?”—MATTHEW xx. 15.

IN the Parable of which this Verse forms part we have a twofold illustration of the inequalities of the human lot. The first illustration is open and palpable—too obvious for the most cursory attention to miss. A householder, or husbandman, goes out into the marketplace early in the morning, at mid-morning, at midday, in the afternoon, and, finally in the evening, only an hour before the close of day, to “hire labourers into his vineyard.” The labourers, therefore, give him respectively one, three, six, nine, and twelve hours’ work. And yet, when pay-time comes, they all, without distinction, receive the same sum—the denarius which was then thought a liberal wage for a full day’s work. Those who had toiled longest get, indeed, all that they have earned ; but, since those who had given much less toil

get as much as they do, they, very naturally, feel themselves aggrieved, and hold that he, who has shewn himself so liberal to their comrades, has been illiberal, if not unjust, to them. If they had no claim to more than they had received, had they not some claim to an equality of treatment with the rest? Did not common fairness demand that one measure should be meted out to them all?

I think we must all be conscious of a certain sympathy with these first-comers, and confess that, had we stood in their place, while we might have admitted that we had got all we had bargained for, our full lawful wage, we should nevertheless have felt that we had been hardly dealt with, in that we had not been treated as well as the after-comers. "It is not fair," we should have said; and though, in our cooler after-moments we might have acknowledged that no real wrong had been done us, we should have stuck to our verdict, "All the same, it wasn't fair, and we won't work for him again."

I believe we were *meant* to feel this inequality, and even to resent it, at least until we come to understand it. For *we* find, as the Hebrew Preacher found long ago, many of these irritating inequalities in human life, and we are just as much irritated by them as he was. *We* feel, we cannot but feel, as he felt when he saw the same chance happen to the evil and to the good, and the same end come to the just and to the unjust. And

when we see *this* man much happier, or much more fortunate, than *that*, although he is not a bit better—although perhaps he is not half so good, no, nor half so wise or half so able—our faith in the justice of God, in the equity of Providence, is shaken, and we are tempted to repeat the old murmur, “The ways of the Lord are not equal.”

There is another illustration of this provoking inequality in our Parable which is not so obvious, but which comes home to our hearts the very moment it is pointed out—an illustration of the inequality of our *work* as well as of our wages. For if at the first glance we sympathize with the resentment of the labourers who were earliest called into the vineyard, as we consider the Parable we begin to pity the poor fellows who were left standing, unhired, in the market-place till the day was far spent, or even till it was well-nigh gone. What had *they* done that so hard a lot should have been assigned to them? There they stood, tools in hand, willing to work, longing for work, black despair gathering in their hearts as the day drew on, and brought no better prospect than that of trudging back, empty-handed, to their foodless homes, where patient or impatient wives awaited them and hungry children. The more we consider their case, and permit it to recall the many similar cases which afflict our modern life, the more deeply we feel the rough brutality of the husbandman’s question, “Why

stand ye here *idle* all the day long?" and the infinite pathos of their reply, "Because no man hath hired us." And in this mood it is a welcome surprise to us to hear the gruff but mellow-hearted husbandman commanding his steward to pay these last the same wage as the first; and we are even a little angry with the very men whose resentment we once shared. We say, "They *must* have known how hard work was to get. They must also have known how much harder it is to lack work than to do it. And, therefore, they should have been the last men in the world to grudge their unlucky rivals the little bit of good fortune which befell them."

This, then, is a parable on the inequalities of human life. It raises a whole class of questions—and a very large class it is—by which we are perplexed, and moved to distrust the providence of God, if not to challenge his justice. Why does one man get so much more than he deserves, and another so much less? Why is one man happy and successful in his work from the first, while another must wait long before he can get any remunerative work to do, or has all his life long to do a work he does not like, or a work which yields no scope for his finer energies and capacities? Why is one man hungry, and another full? Why is one man born to health and the happy temperament which is at once a presage and a cause of success, while another is born to sickness, or stamped with some infirmity which curtails both his

power and his usefulness? Why is one man rich in friends, while another, comparatively poor, is called to part even with the friend that he loves best?

Time would fail me even to enumerate all the questions which the inequalities of the human lot provoke; but I have said enough if I have suggested to you how many these questions are, and how grave. For you must observe, further, that for many of these inequalities we are quite unable to account. I do not deny that, in a rough general way, every man receives according to his deeds, according to his deserts, even here and now, or that many of us get a great deal more than we have deserved. Nor do I doubt that much of the good or ill fortune, which is inexplicable to us, may be perfectly explicable to a cool bystander, who can bring an unbiased eye to the problem, and see how, sometimes by our faults and defects, and sometimes by our very virtues, we offend the world around us, chafe against the inexorable conditions of our lot, and work our own harm or ensure our own defeat. But, none the less, I maintain that, amid the infinite complexities of human life, there are many for which we can find no law, assign no sufficient reason, so long as we look only at the things which are seen and temporal. History is full, and life is full, of problems which no wisdom, unaided by faith, can solve. The wrongs of innocence, the defeats of virtue, the impunity of crime, the success of

impudence, the triumph of vice ; diligence compelled to stand idle and starving all the day long, while indolence is lapped in luxury ; wisdom appealing to ignorance in vain, or casting its pearls before the herd only to be turned upon by the herd and rent ; learning and capacity thrust aside by insolence and craft ; love unreturned, despised, or weeping by an open grave, while imperious selfishness is caressed or waited on with timid observance ; pure religion hiding her unhonoured head in secret places, while the temples of superstition and hypocrisy are thronged with flatterers :—all these are phrases which represent facts, and facts which often lead us to doubt the goodness or the power of God.

And yet, mark you, you do not get rid of these facts by doubting or denying the existence of God ; nor are you any nearer either to a reasonable account of them or to a balm for the wounds, a consolation for the sorrows, they inflict. The inequalities of life do not depend on his existence, or our recognition of his existence. Say there is no God, and you can no longer challenge his justice, but the injustice of which you complain is not removed or lessened. You have not accounted for it, or begun to account. It is no easier to bear, or to explain. Nay, say there is no God who will one day redress every wrong, and set all things straight, and you simply render the case more hopeless, the problem more insoluble, the facts more intolerable.

And here, strange to say, we come on the true answer to an old objection to the miracles of Christ, which it may be worth while to notice in passing since it has been revived and restated in one of the leading magazines for this month.¹ Christ could not have wrought miracles, we are told, or, if He did, He could not be divine, because if He were the Son of God and wrought the miracles attributed to Him, they would simply prove that He *could* feed and heal us all, and save us from pain, bereavement, and death, *and yet does not care to do it*. But who doubts that God, if there be a God, could, if He pleased, feed, heal, and deliver us all from death: and yet does He do it? The argument, if it proves anything, proves that Christ *was* the Son of God, since, possessing the same power with the Father, like the Father He refrained from using it.

He recognized the inequalities of human life, and felt for the pain and grief which they occasion, and yet, except in a few isolated cases, He did not redress them. Must He not, then, have seen some reason for them which we do not see? And may we not expect to find some solution of the problem, or some glimpse of a solution, in his words when He makes these perplexing inequalities the main theme of his discourse?

There is such a glimpse, I believe, in the Parable, and

¹ In Mr. Voysey's very crude and offensive article in *The Fortnightly* for January, 1887.

even in the Verse, before us, though, I confess, it does not force itself on our attention.

1. Indeed the first half of this Question seems to shed darkness on our thoughts rather than light. "*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?*"—you know to what base uses the landlord, the monopolist, the slaveowner, the autocrat, and even the theologian, have put this phrase. You know how fond they have been of appealing to it: how ready to find in it a sanction for all the abuses of wealth and power, without any too careful investigation into what was really their own, and in what sense it was their own. I cannot and need not recapitulate these misapplications, or answer them one by one. There is a common, an authoritative, an overwhelming answer to them all in the Verse itself. For this Verse does not consist, as we might infer from the Authorized Version, of two questions, but of one, as we learn from the Revised Version or from a glance at the Original; and that which Christ has joined together we have no right to put asunder. The whole question runs: "*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own, or is thine eye evil because I am good?*" And the implication is obvious to the meanest capacity. It is only lawful for a man to do what he will with his own *when he is good*; when, like the householder, he renders to no man less than his due, and to many men more than their due. It is only lawful for a man to do what

he will when his will is a good will, a beneficent will, when he is bent on doing good with that which he calls his own, when he is striving to make the best use of it ; when his conscience is king ; when he is contemplating and aiming to promote, not his own selfish interests, but the welfare of his fellows. If any landlord be sincerely convinced that it is for the common weal that he should rack-rent his tenants ; if any slaveowner be honestly persuaded that he can do nothing better for his negro neighbours than keep them in bondage, and flog or shoot them if they run away from it ; if any despot is disinterestedly sure that, for the well-being of his subjects, he must deny them all liberty of speech and action, we may wonder how he should have reached his conclusion, but we must admit the validity of his argument—for him. But if he so much as suspect that he has simply his own interests in view—his own ease, influence, wealth, pomp, or glory—he has no longer any right to do what he will with his own, simply because his will is not a good or kindly will. Only the man who denies to none of his fellows all that they can fairly claim of him, while to some he gives more than they can claim, has any right to appeal to the example of the Householder, or to find a sanction in the words of my text. “I may do what I will with mine own,” is *not* a Christian principle. The true Christian principle is, “I may do what I will when my will is a good will, when it

is bent on the welfare, the benefit, of my neighbours, when I use mine own for just and gracious ends." And it will be well for us to bear this principle in mind whenever we are tempted to make a selfish, an unjust, or a cruel, use of our property, our influence, or of anything that is ours.

2. But this again, like the argument on the miracles of Christ, is only by the way, and I touch upon it simply to make my exposition of the Verse as complete as I can. Our main theme is the irritating and inexplicable inequalities of human life ; and our main inquiry, What light does the Verse throw upon them. It throws this light upon them. If we are to hear the voice of God in this Parable, and to substitute the almighty Ruler of the universe for the Householder, and the inequalities of our lot for his unequal treatment of his labourers both in the market and in the vineyard, then our Lord is teaching us *that God only does what He will with his own because He is good*, because his will is a beneficent will ; or, to put the same thought in another form, God's purpose in the inequalities which perplex our minds and fret our hearts is a good, a beneficent, purpose. We do not understand them ; we cannot account for or justify them ; we do not see *how* they work for our good even when we are told that they are for our good ; we may not solve the mystery of his Providence until we die, until long after we have passed through death into life

eternal : but Christ asks us to believe that they all proceed from the goodness of God, that our good is the end for which they are designed and to which they contribute. He asks us to believe that He knows what we do not know, sees what we cannot see ; and that He sees and knows how large and generous are the ends which his Father has in view for us, how happy is the close to which our course is conducting us.

Now I should not venture to find all this in the mere implication of my text, nor could I expect you to believe that it means all this, if the implication were not confirmed by the whole body, yes, and by the whole spirit, of our Lord's teaching. But, as you know, both the Old Testament and the New give us this great assurance, this great and sustaining hope. They both abound in Apocalyptic passages which affirm and describe the coming of a time in which every man will receive according to his deeds, will be paid his full wages and something over ; in which every wrong will be redressed, every loss compensated, nay, turned to gain : passages which prolong the lines of human life beyond the grave, and shew them to us as moving on for ever in the same general direction indeed, and yet as ever moving upward into light. And, therefore, I have every right to ask you to take to your hearts the full comfort of the fact that, even when the mind of Christ was called to confront the inequalities by which we are

troubled and perplexed, so far from sharing our trouble and perplexity, He could still assure us, "God is good. God's will is a good will. He means your good. He is not unjust or austere. It is his very bounty which makes you think Him unfair, unequal in his ways. It is because He is training you for a larger higher life than the present, while you insist on judging Him as if the present life were all, that you mistrust and misjudge Him. He will yet give you all you deserve, and more. Nay, if your will be a good will, He will even give you all you desire, and more."

Faith, then, solves the problem which Reason propounds, and for which it has no solution whether it admit, or whether it deny, the existence and rule of God. But even faith does not *demonstrate* the problem. It does not work out the sum, and put all the details of the answer into our hands, so that we may go over it as often as we please, and verify it from point to point. It does not sell the Key with the Arithmetic. But it does give us the final answer, the true answer, when it assures that God *is*, and that God is *good*; and that it is only because his goodness is so great, and because we cannot as yet measure it on its true scale, that we fail to see what, and how good, his purpose for us is. For the measures of time do not apply to eternity; nor can we work out the end and meaning of an immortal life in the terms of our mortality. If there be in man both a de-

veloped animal and an undeveloped angel, since it is very certain that he cannot comprehend even the animal which he has outgrown, very certain that he can do no more than frame the faintest guess of what the life of the beasts is to them, what its meaning is, and what its end ; how much less can he hope to form any adequate conception of what his own life will be like, or to what lofty end it will soar, when he becomes as the angels who are in heaven ? We cannot jump off our own shadow, the hindering shadow of our mortality, and rise into the life to be ; and yet we cannot understand the meaning and end of this mortal life save as we understand its sequel in the life to come. Reason is powerless to help us. If we are to have any solution of the mystery, it can only be revealed by faith.

It *has* been revealed to faith. And if now that we have received Christ's revelation of the immortality of man and of the boundless love and mercy of God ; if, while believing that He knew both God and man as we shall never know them, that He saw our life, and saw it whole, from its commencement to its close, we still insist on judging our life and God's dealings with our life as if the grave *were* its goal, we are like one who should attempt to measure the vast astronomical spaces with a carpenter's foot-rule, or to calculate the motions of the stars, by help of the multiplication-table, on a penny slate ; we are like one who should judge a tale

by its opening chapter, or a drama by its first act or scene, and refuse to wait for the catastrophe which is to explain and vindicate it all.

If we are wise, we shall not thus judge, and misjudge, the solemn drama of human life. Because "we spend our years as a tale that is told," we shall wait for the end which crowns the work before we criticize or censure the work. Or if that end has been afore revealed to us, we shall refuse to read it by our own unassisted vision ; we shall read and judge it in the light of the revelation vouchsafed us.

Nay, more : if we are wise, we shall find in the very inequalities of life a warrant of immortality. We shall take all the wrongs, losses, and sorrows of time, with all the perplexity and pain they breed within us, not as proofs that God is unjust or unkind, but, rather, as proofs that our life has been laid out on a nobler scale and mounts to a loftier end than we had imagined ; as proofs that we do not die when we die, but pass into a world for which the discipline of this life is intended to prepare us, a world in which the training commenced here will be continued, and carried to a close so large and lofty that even faith cannot fully grasp it, so glorious as to transcend all the fond prophecies of hope.

To every troubled and heavy-laden soul, then, aching and perplexed under the wrongs of life, I bring the word

of Christ : "God is good, and means your good. The very inequalities of this present time, which you so much resent, prove that He is training you, not for this life alone, but for immortality. Let not your eyes be clouded with dark and evil thoughts of Him because his goodness transcends the measures of a mortal mind. You have the promise of his mercy already. Only wait and trust, and you shall have the proof of his mercy ere long."

XVI.

JESUS THE JUST.

“And Jesus who is called Justus.”—COLOSSIANS iv. 11.

IF these words stood alone, or if they occurred in another context, we might reasonably infer that they indicated no one less than our Lord Himself; for *his* name was “Jesus,” and He too was called “that just one.” But, standing where they do, we know that Jesus the Just was the name, not of the Lord of the Church, but of an obscure disciple whose name occurs here, indeed, but never occurs again. And even here we are told so little of him, except his name, that it is easy for the indolent reader to assume that we know absolutely nothing of him, and are quite unable to conceive what manner of man he was. We may even infer, as some *have* inferred, that his name is mentioned here simply to illustrate in what minute points the Son of Man was made like unto his brethren, bearing a name, *Jesus*, which was in common use then, though reverence forbids us to give it to our children now, and winning

an epithet, *the Just*, which was the cherished distinction of many a pious Pharisee. And, indeed, if it will help us to believe that we may share his spirit and live his life, it will be well for us to bear in mind that Jesus, which is only the Greek form of Joshua, was a name in common use among the Jews, and that even the Lord's brother was known as "James *the Just*."

1. But do we know absolutely nothing of the Jesus who is mentioned here? We know at least that he was called *Justus*. And this epithet marks him out as one who was a rigid and blameless observer of the Mosaic law and customs. Ordinarily, too, the epithet implies an exclusive and fanatical devotion to the Hebrew law and traditions, a devotion which closed the eyes of the mind against the claims of any system of thought and morals outside the circle of the Law, and even prejudiced it against any new development of the Law, however wise and opportune it might be. A man whom the Jews called "just" might be a proselyte, indeed; but in that case he must be a bigot,—one of those converts, or perverts, who outdo in sectarian zeal the religious community to which they attach themselves—or they would never have accorded him that distinction.

2. Jesus, however, was not a proselyte, for St. Paul expressly tells us that he was "of the circumcision;" and, with him, this phrase implied Jewish blood as well as Jewish religion. But he must have been very exact

and scrupulous in his observance of his religious duties, and of all the customs and traditions by which the rabbis "fenced" and defended the Mosaic law; in short, he must have been eminently pious and devout after the Jewish manner of the time, before he could have been entitled Jesus the Just. And we know what that manner was, how rigid, how narrow, how illiberal, how sectarian, how scornful of all that the Gentiles took for wisdom, virtue, piety, and how bitterly opposed to all that bore the Christian stamp.

3. And yet this Jew, though a Hebrew of the Hebrews, was a *Christian*. He was a member and minister of the Christian Church at Rome. He was a friend and fellow-worker with St. Paul, the most catholic of the Apostles; to whom the Law was a yoke insupportable by any man whom Christ had made free, and the traditions "fables" which none but "old wives" could any longer believe, and who counted those who put their trust in the Law among the adversaries of Christ! In spite of all his prejudices, all his eminence in the Hebrew piety, all his contempt for "the impostor of Nazareth," Jesus, though he was called Justus, had accepted the crucified Nazarene as the true Lord and Saviour of men. He had renounced the traditions of the fathers. He had flung off the yoke of the Law. He had counted all that was most precious to him but dross that he might win Christ and be found in Him. In a word, he had pre-

ferred the inward and spiritual to the outward and ceremonial conception of Religion—an immense achievement, an immense advance, for a man of his blood and training and habits. With all the forces of education, custom, acquired eminence and advantage, pinning him down to his old place, he had broken away from them all to embrace a new faith, to enter a new service, to find scope for the new devotion which had been kindled in his heart.

4. Of the time, manner, and circumstances of this radical change we are told nothing; for this distinguished Jew seems to have filled a very lowly place in the Christian Church. But for St. Paul's passing mention of his name we should have never heard of him. And though St. Paul's pen has conferred on him a human immortality, so that his name will never quite pass from the lips of men, no one could have then suspected, and least of all Jesus himself, that the Apostle's pen possessed that magic power.

But that, however it took place, the change *was* radical and complete, is beyond a doubt. For St. Paul tells us that in all Rome, nay, in the whole Roman Church, which was largely composed of Jewish converts, there were only three Jews, of whom Jesus the Just was one, who were his loyal and stedfast fellow-labourers in the kingdom and service of Christ. The three were Aristarchus, a fellow-prisoner, Mark the cousin of

Barnabas, and Jesus who was called Justus. So that not only had this distinguished Jew renounced the faith of his fathers for the broader faith of Christ, not only had he stepped down from his pride of place in the Synagogue to become a humble and obscure minister in the Church ; but, once in the Church, he had thrown in his lot with its broader and more liberal champions, although here too he had to swim against the main current of belief and action. The Jewish members of the Church at Rome were numerous and powerful. And, as a body, they joined the Hebraist faction which set itself against Paul in every church, turned his ministry into a perpetual warfare, and filled his heart with indignation and grief. Only three were found to stand by the Apostle who maintained that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Greek, no heavenly favourites, no advantage to be derived from blood ; that circumcision was nothing and uncircumcision nothing, but all became one new man in Him, with an equal claim on his love, and an equal interest in the common salvation.

Jesus, who was called Justus, was one of the faithful three. As he had sided with Christ against the Synagogue, so now he sides with St. Paul against the Church. As he had ventured to differ from his fathers, so also he takes leave to differ from his brethren. And the remarkable, the beautiful, point in his character is that he always shews himself strong upon the weaker side, or at

least the unpopular side ; that in both the great spiritual crises of his life, when he had to choose betwixt two, he takes the more generous, catholic, and liberal part. A man of an open mind, he is also a man of a kindly magnanimous spirit, and ranges himself on what must have seemed to be the losing cause. He does not suffer his eminence as a Pharisee to hold him back from becoming a Christian ; nor does he suffer his personal interest and advantage as a Jew to hold him back from the frankest and freest communion with the Gentiles. The Jews would fain have confined the favour of God to the Synagogue. The Hebraists would fain have confined the grace of Christ to the Circumcision. But Jesus the Just is content to incur the hatred both of the Jew and the Hebraist that he may be true to the claims of Christian charity. In his love for the Gentiles, and for the Apostle of the Gentiles, he becomes a fellow-worker with him, and for them, in the kingdom of God.

5. Jew and Pharisee as he was, then, he must have been a man of a singular and rare humanity, a catholic, open-minded, large-hearted Christian, as bold and resolute as he was loving and humane. And if we ask, "What was the origin and source of this fine 'enthusiasm of humanity'?" the answer comes clearly enough from a phrase which may sound at first a little obscure. He was, we are told, a fellow-worker with St. Paul, not in, but "*unto* the kingdom of God." That is to say, he was

animated, possessed, dominated, by a great idea which he had learned from Christ. For had not that other and better Jesus constantly spoken of "the kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven," which He had come to set up on the earth? a kingdom wide as the world, open not to one race alone, but to every race; a kingdom into which all men were to be drawn; a kingdom of which God Himself was to be Lord, and to prove Himself the Lord by writing the laws of heaven on the minds and hearts of all who entered it?

This was the great revelation which Jesus Christ came to make, the great idea which He lived and died to declare, illustrate, and enforce. And Jesus the Just had caught and embraced this idea. He was possessed by it. To labour *unto*, towards, this kingdom of God, to help to bring it about, to establish it in this heart and that, and so to prepare for its coming in all hearts,—this was the aim he had set before him; this the task to which he devoted himself, and for the sake of which he was content to sacrifice his standing as a Jew, his eminence as a Pharisee, and to incur the hatred and breast the opposition of the very Church, if the Church should prove so untrue to her Master as to set herself against it. A character so remarkable, a devotion so absolute, a courage so fearless as that of Justus can only be explained by the presence and inspiration of some great motive. And *this* was the motive which animated

and supported him in the toils and sacrifices which he shared with the Apostle Paul, this fair and noble dream of a divine kingdom in which all the races of our divided earth should become one, one in the love and service of the one only God, and all that was earthly in them should become "pure heavenly":—a dream yet to be fulfilled indeed, but which must be fulfilled if there is any truth in God or any hope for man.

And was not this a sufficient motive, a motive adequate to produce the radical and noble change which transformed Jesus the just Jew into the friend and fellow-worker of the Apostle to the Gentiles, so that he did not count life itself—and much less any personal advantage or privilege—dear unto him if only he might help to build up the kingdom of God among men, and help to make it universal? If *we* were animated by this motive, haunted and possessed by this ideal, should we not soon outgrow all our bigotries, and break away from all our sectarian limitations, think less of our own advantages, and even of our own salvation, and more of the welfare and salvation of the world? Would the safety of the elect content us, or even our own safety? Should we settle down to an easy enjoyment of "the comforts of Religion" while the world around us was perishing for lack of a knowledge we could impart? Should we be zealous to maintain our sectarian feuds, forgetting that the world can only be drawn to God as

it sees that we are all one, really one, new man in Christ Jesus? Should we not rather break through all hindering and separating bonds, that we might be fellow-labourers "unto the kingdom of God"?

Men sometimes talk as if charity were fatal to zeal, although in every other connection, love is admitted to be the strongest and most impelling of all motives, the mainspring of all generous and heroic action. But was Jesus Justus the less, or the more, zealous because he preferred the universal kingdom of God to the provincial Judaism in which he had been brought up, or even to the sectarian Hebraism of the Church which he had joined? And need *we* be the less zealous for the salvation of men because we account catholicity the true temper of the Church, and charity the chief of the Christian graces, and cherish the largest hope in the mercy of God? In proportion as our charity is deep and sincere, it will be fervent, and will constrain us to labours and sacrifices for the spiritual welfare of the world around us. Our charity is only that of the lip, not that of the heart, if it does not kindle and inflame our zeal.

A fellow-worker with St. Paul was called to no light and easy task: and though we may be content to fall short of Paul's high mark, yet who would willingly be less, or do less, than Jesus who was called Justus?

We have already gained, I hope, a tolerably clear

and adequate conception of the man. We have seen that, though a rigid Jew and an eminent Pharisee, Justus willingly encountered shame, enmity, contempt, from the Jews, and broke away from all the habits and interests of his life, to embrace the gospel and serve the church of Christ. And we have also seen that in order to serve Christ, to maintain the universality of his kingdom and prepare the way for its spread, he also broke away from his brother Hebraists, and was one of the only three who heartily associated himself with the toils and sacrifices of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

But there are still two points to be touched before our study of him will be complete ; and, though they are both of minor importance, they are far too pleasant and significant to be passed over in silence.

6. The first is simply an illustration of the liberality of his spirit. In common with Aristarchus and Mark, he learns that St. Paul is writing a letter to the Gentile Church at Colossæ ; and, Jew as he is, he cannot be content to miss an opportunity of shewing his love and goodwill to the Gentile Christians. "Salute them from me," he says to Paul ; and accordingly Paul writes, "Jesus who is called Justus saluteth you." In little things, as well as in great, the man proves his devotion to the kingdom which embraces the whole world, and recognizes his brotherhood with men of every race.

7. The second is simply an illustration of his entire

sympathy with St. Paul. He, as well as Mark and Aristarchus, has been "a comfort" to me, writes the Apostle. And the Greek word for "comfort" *may* have been, as several of our scholars have assumed, one of those medical terms which St. Paul picked up from Luke the physician; though I am not at all sure that we need to trace it to Luke's lips. The Greek word is *παρηγορία*, or, as we call it, *paregoric*; a word which may have been as familiar in its Greek form to the Apostle as in its English form it is to us. But, wherever he got it, the word meant something more definite than "comfort," and perhaps we shall best render his thought if we understand St. Paul to say that Jesus Justus had been a *cordial* to him, so stimulating and soothing had he found his friendship. There is something tender, familiar, affectionate in the phrase. It implies that the Apostle found this once rigid Jew, and now resolute Christian, *sympathetic*; that fellowship with him braced and calmed his mind, touched and strengthened his heart; that he *liked* him, and liked to have him with him.

As, indeed, may very well have been the case. For the two men, different as they were, and though the one was so much greater than the other, had passed through much the same discipline and experience. They had both begun as fanatical Jews, Hebrews of the Hebrews, Pharisees of the Pharisees, breathing out threatenings

and slaughter against the Church. And they had both moved onward to the same position, not simply in that they had both embraced the Jesus whom the Jews rejected as the Christ of God, and become members and ministers in the Church of Christ ; but also in that they both belonged to the broader, the more liberal and progressive, section of the Church. They both pursued the same ideal—that universal kingdom of God in which all the kingdoms of this world were to merge and blend, in which all the races of men were to be created anew in Christ Jesus. There was much to bind them together, therefore ; they shared much in common : they were of one temper ; they were animated by one and the self-same spirit ; they were labouring together for a common end.

8. Now if any of you would have said a few minutes ago that you “knew nothing” of Jesus who was called Justus ; if, when I gave out my text, you assumed that nothing could be known of the man, permit me to ask whether you have not now reached as clear a conception of his character as you have of that of most of your immediate neighbours ? and to remind you that I have not told you a single fact about him which you might not have found out for yourselves. With very little pains you might have discovered from what St. Paul here says of him, that he had once been a rigid and fanatical Jew, a distinguished and bigoted Pharisee ;

that, in the teeth of all his habits, prejudices, interests, he had been constrained to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, to love, serve, and worship Him as the true Saviour of men ; that, though he had naturally allied himself with the Hebraist section of the Church at Rome, no sooner did he come under the influence of St. Paul than he severed himself from the Christian, as he had before severed himself from the Jewish, "circumcision," once more sacrificing many of his strongest convictions and attachments ; that it was his faith in and his craving for the universal kingdom of God, his hope and strong desire that all men should be saved by being brought to a knowledge of the truth, which inspired all his toils, all his sacrifices ; that in his humanity, his philanthropy, his genuine love for "men his brethren," he would not willingly miss any opportunity of "saluting" the Gentile converts to the Christian Faith, and shewing that his love for them was as tender and true as if they had been of Jewish blood ; and that by cherishing this love, this enthusiasm, for humanity at large, the rigid Jew, the bigoted Pharisee, became of so gentle and sympathetic a spirit that even the large-brained and large-hearted Paul found fellowship with him a comfort, a cordial, which at once soothed and stimulated him in the hour when nearly all men forsook him, when, in prison and in bonds, he was daily expecting a cruel and a lonely death.

All this I say you might have discovered for yourselves by meditating on the words in which St. Paul describes him. And I say it, not in rebuke, but for your encouragement. For I believe there is hardly one of the obscure servants of Christ mentioned in the New Testament, and of whom you know the names, but know little more, of whom you may not know much more if only you will reflect on the little we are told of them : of whom you may not learn at least so much as will render their example a stimulus and a comfort to you. For it is these humble predecessors of ours in the service of Christ, and in the toils and sacrifices which that service implies, who stand nearest to us, with whom we are most at home, and in whose examples we may often find the most powerful and welcome incitement to fidelity, to diligence, to a stedfast continuance in well-doing. They do not, or they need not, stand very high above us. What *they* did, we may hope to do. What *they* bore, we may hope to bear. What *they* achieved, we may hope to achieve.

Jesus Justus does not seem to have been a person of any special mark in the Church. He is never mentioned again. We should never have so much as heard his name if he had not bethought him to ask St. Paul to send his love to the Christians at Colossæ. And yet how honourable a character he had built up ! how many and great were the sacrifices he had made—sacrifices,

moreover, of the very kind which many of us are called to make to-day! what an open mind he kept! what a generous and loving heart! what a catholic and sympathetic spirit! How much he did to serve the Church, and the Lord of the Church, not only by his own labours, but also by being a cordial to the harassed spirit of one far greater than himself!

Most of all, perhaps, he impresses us by the somewhat rare combination of strength with sweetness, of charity with devotion, of the widest philanthropy and the largest hopes for men with a zeal which halted before no toil, no sacrifice. Thoughtfulness and activity do not always go together with equal steps. And those who cherish large hopes for mankind are often at least suspected of indifference, of rendering only a half-hearted support to efforts for the extension of the Divine kingdom. No charge should be more untrue. No charge can be more untrue when those who think think deeply, or when those whose faith in the mercy of God is large hold that faith in sincerity and in truth. For *them* to be indifferent is as though those who believe health to be the normal and ultimate state of all men should be careless of their present sanitary conditions, or refuse to support a hospital for the crippled and diseased. Jesus the Just was not indifferent to the progress and extension of the Church of Christ whether at Rome or in distant Colossæ, large as was his faith in the universal kingdom of God.

He was a fellow-labourer with the most laborious of the Apostles "unto" that kingdom. And in proportion as we share his spirit and cherish his hope, we shall be fellow-workers with him. The love of Christ will constrain us. The love of man will constrain us. The great hope we cherish will be our inspiration and support under all the disappointments and weariness of our work. Because we expect great things from God, we shall attempt great things for Him, and for the coming of his kingdom in all the earth.

XVII.

DEMETRIUS.

“Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself ; yea, and we also bear witness.”—iii. JOHN 12.

THE third Epistle of St. John, as it is the latest, so also it is one of the shortest of the Christian Scriptures, so short that it is rather a brief private note than a formal public letter. But, small as is the canvass, it holds a large and stirring picture. In a few sentences it tells us more, gives us a more authentic description, of what Church life was like in the last quarter of the first century, and probably in the last decade of that century, than we might learn from many a long and formal treatise. If I am to tell you the story which it compresses into so small a compass—and I *must* tell it—I must not only use a great many more words than it contains, I must also give you a preface to it which will be at least as long as the Epistle itself.

We are not told to what Church this note, or letter, was addressed, though it was evidently a Church of some size and importance. But all the indications of time and

place which have come down to us imply that it was written from Ephesus, toward the close of St. John's long life and ministry, and addressed to one of the neighbouring Churches of Asia Minor, which St. Paul had founded some thirty or forty years before. There were many such churches in the wealthy and prosperous cities of this great province; and in all of them, no doubt, the tradition of St. Paul's teaching and power was carefully preserved; while in some, or in some members of many of them, there may have been a certain indisposition to submit to the authority of another Apostle, even to that of the venerable and beloved John. Diotrophes was probably only one of a class who said "I am of *Paul*" in a tone which made the words mean, "I am *not* of John," and turned the authority of the one Apostle against the other. Obviously there was a good deal of independence in the Churches when one Church in a province could refuse communion with men who were commended to them by another Church, could excommunicate those who did commune with them, and an unknown Diotrophes could not only set himself, but persuade the majority of his fellow-members to set themselves, against the request and command of one of the Apostles who had seen the Lord, and he the disciple whom Jesus had loved above the rest.

But if the Churches had grown in independence, they had not declined in missionary zeal. The Churches

under the charge of St. John were sending out evangelists, such as Demetrius, to the Gentiles, and so carrying on the work of St. Paul, nay, carrying it on in his very spirit ; for just as St. Paul refused to "live by" the gospel he preached, or to be chargeable to any, lest his motive should be misconstrued, so Demetrius and his fellows "went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles" (Verse 6).

In fine, the impression which the Epistle leaves on our minds is that the members of the primitive and apostolic Church were not, as they have sometimes been drawn, saints who lived together in an unbroken charity and peace, "too good for human nature's daily use," but men and women of like passions with ourselves ; with much that was good in them, but also with not a little that came of evil ; capable of heroic self-sacrifice, but also capable of sinking into selfish ambitions and envies and strifes, of falling, in short, into the very errors and faults of which we find some lingering traits even in the Church life of to-day, when we ought to be so much wiser and better than they. And this is a fact which we should bear in mind, not as rejoicing to bring them down to our own poor level, but that we may not attribute to them an impossible perfection, and draw from it an inference of despair. A little better than we are we may hope, and, all things considered, even believe, that they were ; but the Church life even of the Apostolic

Church was not an ideal life; it was not beyond, but well within, our reach, if only we are true to the truth and grace of Christ.

Here is a bit of its story which you may compare with your own experience. Demetrius and his fellows had been called to the evangelic office, and had devoted themselves to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. St. John knew them, loved them, approved them, gave them letters of commendation to the Churches of Asia Minor; and, among others, to the Church of which both Gaius and Diotrophes were members. Diotrophes, evidently a man of some mark and gifts, declined to have anything to do with them—perhaps because Demetrius did not come first to him, or did not make much of and defer to him; perhaps because he preferred St. Paul's doctrinal and argumentative method of teaching, and his demand for faith, to St. John's divine and deep simplicity, and his eternal insistence on charity, or love. In any case he did not like Demetrius, did not take to him; and doubtless he soon found or imagined abundant reasons for his dislike. Having formed, and uttered, his hasty opinion, Diotrophes was not the man to draw back from it. Nor was he content to have it to himself, to hold it alone. He must impose it on the Church. When others would have "received" the evangelists, he forbade them. If they paid no heed to his prohibition, he got them "cast out" of the Church; the motto of this lover of

pre-eminence being, apparently, "Better to reign in a small church than to serve in a large one."

Undeterred by his influence and threats, the hospitable Gaius had welcomed the repulsed and disheartened Evangelists to his house, and furthered them in their good work. Whether he also was excommunicated by Diotrophes, or whether he was too wealthy and powerful a man to be attacked, we are not told. But, at all risks, he discharged his duty, having, I suppose, an affectionate reverence for St. John which made the displeasure of a Diotrophes sit lightly upon him. Demetrius was very grateful to him; and, when he returned to Ephesus, reported the fidelity of Gaius both to the Apostle, and to the Church of which John was pastor or bishop. And now the Apostle sends back Demetrius, and writes to Gaius, commending and encouraging him, and promising him a speedy visit, in the course of which he will depose Diotrophes from his pride of place, make him eat his "wicked words," and restore those whom he had cast out.

Besides the light it casts on the conditions of the primitive Church, then, this brief Letter sets before us three men—Demetrius the evangelist, Gaius the faithful servant of the Church, and Diotrophes who assumed to lord it over God's heritage—at each of whom I will ask you to look, that you may frame some definite conception of his character, and learn the lessons he has to teach.

For the present let us be content with looking at Demetrius, taking him first because he was the bone of contention between Gaius and Diotrophes. Of him we are told less than of the other two, but still enough, I think, to lead us to a tolerably adequate conception of him.

All three of these men were in some sense ministers, *i.e.*, servants, of the Church ; but in the Apostolic Church the Christian ministry took many forms. Some were prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (Ephesians iv. 11) ; nay, St. Paul seems to distinguish even between the minister who taught and the minister who exhorted, between the minister who ruled and the minister who bestowed the alms of the Church (Romans xii. 8). And we have recently learned, from an ancient document (the *Didaché*) that, as a rule, the presbyter or bishop, what we call "the pastor," of a Church was the ruling and representative elder, the man who administered the affairs of the Church, managed its business, and spoke for it to other churches or to the world at large ; while those who assumed the office and function which we now think of as ministerial mainly were called teachers, evangelists, prophets. The bishop, or pastor, was not necessarily a man who could preach ; the preacher, whether he taught, exhorted, or prophesied, did not necessarily take an active or forward part in Church business or discipline ; no, not even if, like

St. Paul, he was teacher, evangelist, prophet, all in one.

Gaius and Diotrophes, probably, belonged to the former, the ruling, class ; while Demetrius, certainly, belonged to the latter, the preaching, class.

For Demetrius was *an evangelist* ; *i.e.*, he proclaimed the evangel of love and mercy, the good tidings of great joy, which came by Jesus Christ : nay, after a time, and before we meet with him, he seems to have specialized himself still further, and to have become *a travelling evangelist*, or missionary. As a missionary even, he seems to have devoted himself, like St. Paul before him, specially to the service *of the Gentiles* (Verse 7) ; though we may be sure that, like St. Paul, he missed no opportunity of proving to the Jews out of their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

In attempting to define any man of that age, indeed, or any function, we must before all things be on our guard against drawing our outlines with too rigid or too dark a pencil. For, then at least, one man played many parts ; and he who was a teacher might melt into a missionary ; he who was a ruling elder might pass into a preaching elder ; while, occasionally, some one man, a Paul or a John, gifted above his fellows, might absorb into himself all possible functions, and be ruler, preacher, evangelist, and prophet, as well as an Apostle,—just as in “ the spacious times of great Elizabeth ” one and the

self-same man might be scholar, statesman, admiral, general, diplomatist, and even his own gardener or architect. The sharp lines of demarcation between classes, professions, functions, are indeed of quite recent origin.

Because Demetrius was an evangelist and a missionary, I suspect he was also a prophet. It is but a little while since we studied "the faithful sayings of the New Testament," sayings which we saw reason to think authentic utterances of the Christian prophets.¹ And some of you may remember that, as a rule, these sayings embody the facts and truths which are the very substance of the Gospel; such as, for instance, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The man who could utter such sentences as these, who could compress the whole gospel into simple and portable forms, was the very man for an evangelist or a missionary. And no doubt many of the evangelists were also prophets—Demetrius, perhaps, among them.

But whatever his gifts, and whether few or many, there can be no doubt of the *self-sacrificing and disinterested spirit* in which he used them. Simply to travel was dangerous in those days, since every stranger was then held to be an enemy. But to go into the schools, market-places, and sanctuaries of strange cities, in order to teach a strange religion, was very like courting death. Among the sophists and philosophers of the time, indeed,

¹ See Volume III., Discourses 16-23.

with ears ever on the itch for some new thing, such a man as Demetrius, with such a message as his, might meet with nothing worse than ridicule and contempt. But the ignorant and cruel mob of those ancient Asian cities (*e.g.*, Acts xix. 23-41), each of which was devoted to the service of its own deity, was prompt enough to take fire at whatever could be construed as an insult to their special shrine, and knew no better sport than tearing a setter forth of strange gods limb from limb.

It tasked courage, therefore, to venture among them with the simple evangel of Christ, which at once rebuked their vices and dethroned their gods. And to do this, not for gain, or fame, or hire ; to go out into a strange cruel world, not knowing where to look for daily bread, casting oneself wholly on the providence of God and the bounty of unknown brethren, was to make this hard perilous task still harder and more perilous. But Demetrius did not shrink. He would "take nothing of the Gentiles." Like St. Paul, he knew well enough that, if he seemed to make anything by his message, the sharp suspicious traders of the Asian harbours and markets would close their minds and hearts, as well as their purses, against him. Hence he would take nothing from them ; no, not even when it was offered him, lest he should be placing a stone of stumbling in the way of any whose consciences had been touched.

If we ask for the motive which inspired this noble and

self-sacrificing devotion to the spiritual welfare of men, we are told that it was simply "*for the sake of the Name*" that Demetrius devoted himself to the service of the Gentiles. And this quaint phrase is one of those affectionate abbreviations which are sure to creep into use among the members of a community who are bound together by a common feeling and purpose, and is only one of several such abbreviations to be found in the New Testament. Thus, for instance, the way, or method, of Christian thought and conduct is several times called simply "the Way," or "this Way" in the Acts of the Apostles; and we read of Saul hunting out "any who were of the Way," that he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Chap. ix. 2), or of certain Jews at Ephesus who "spoke evil of this Way before the multitude," and the "no small stir concerning the Way" which arose in the same city among the Gentiles (Chap. xix. 9-23); and are told that Felix, the governor of Cæsarea, had a "more exact knowledge of the Way" than the Jews who accused Paul before his bar (Chap. xxiv. 22), while Paul himself admits in his defence, "This I confess unto thee, that after the Way, which they call a Sect, so serve I the God of our Fathers" (Chap. xxiv. 14). Of course "the Way" stood for "the way of Christ," or the Christian way of thought and life: but when the term was common and familiar there was no need to utter it at full length, since every one was talking of it and knew what was

meant. And, in like manner, "the Name" was the name of the great Saviour of men, and stood for all that was known of Him, all that was summed up in Him. At times we read in the New Testament of "the Name of Jesus" (Philippians ii. 10), or "the Name of Christ" (1 Peter iv. 14), or "the Name of the Lord" (James v. 14), or "the Name of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians i. 12), or "the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans i. 5), and are told that men preached in this Name, or believed in this Name, or asked in this Name, or were gathered together in this Name. But at other times, when everybody would know what was meant, and would instinctively supply the omitted words, "the Name" was used absolutely and by itself, as it is here, where we are told that "for the sake of *the Name*" Demetrius and his companions went forth to bear witness to the truth among the Gentiles. What moved them to this great and perilous work was the love they bore to the Name of Jesus Christ their Lord, and the Lord and Saviour of all men. For, as I have recently reminded you,¹ this Name, by a happy Providence, embodies and summarizes the whole work and gospel of "the Man from heaven;" since "Jesus" means "Saviour," and "Christ" means "Anointed," and "Lord" means "God:" so that what the Name really covers and implies is that Jesus Christ was the Saviour whom God had promised and anointed,

¹ See discourse on *The Christian Commandments*, p. 88.

and that God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself. This was the truth to which Demetrius bore witness, this the gospel which he preached ; and it was because his whole heart was penetrated and informed by love for this great Saviour and Lord that he went forth into a strange and hostile world to make Him known to men who were perishing for lack of knowledge—his enthusiasm for the Man Christ Jesus developing into an enthusiasm of humanity.

An evangelist, possibly a prophet, animated by a most self-sacrificing and disinterested spirit, which sprang from an ardent love for Christ the Saviour of men, Demetrius won for himself a threefold testimony : (1) He won "the witness of *all*," says St. John ; *i.e.*, the witness of all good men, of all who were capable of appreciating goodness. Even those who rejected his message had nothing to allege against the man, save the sublime folly of a perilous and unprofitable enthusiasm ; while those who accepted it from him, or had already accepted it from other lips, could not but admire the fineness of his spirit and the fire of his zeal.

(2) More and better still, he won "the testimony of *the truth itself*." For he who daily sets his life upon the die that he may be true to his convictions, he who, moved by the grace and love of Christ, seeks not his own things but the things of others ; he who devotes himself with burning zeal and all-enduring courage to the service of

truth and the salvation of men,—to him the truth itself, which has made him what he is, bears witness. He does not merely “prate” about the truth, as a Diotrophes may; he embodies it in deeds of love and self-sacrifice of which he would have been incapable but for the truth which animates and sustains him. Men do not despise ease and a sure provision for their daily wants, they do not daily affront every form of danger and loss, for truths, or beliefs, which have no real, no vital, hold upon them. “They who do such things as these declare plainly,” they “make it manifest,” that they are the servants of a truth which they love more than they love themselves. It is the truth itself which speaks through them, and bears witness to them.

(3) Last of all, St. John adds his own testimony to that of the previous witnesses: “*we also* bear witness.” And any man who has devoted himself to the service and spread of a truth which has not met with wide or general recognition will understand the special charm which this testimony would exert on Demetrius. From sheer love of the truth, or conviction, which God has given him, and a strong desire that his fellow-men should share the light and strength and comfort it has brought him, a man may be faithful to it, and go on proclaiming it, whatever the risk or loss his fidelity may involve. But how unspeakable will be the comfort, how will it nerve his courage and sustain his devotion, if some great Master, whom he

loves and venerates as far wiser and better than himself, far nearer to the Source of all truth and grace, openly backs him up in his work, and says, "I love him ; I trust him ; I commend him to you : it is the truth which he is teaching and by which he lives ; receive *him* as you would receive me." Many of us, I dare say, have heard such an encouraging voice as this, and know therefore what a peculiar force and charm it would carry for Demetrius. And if we have not, we have only to remember how Carlyle and his wife, living their poor, proud, starved life at Craigenputtock, sprang at the commendation of Goethe, and even at the sympathy of Emerson, in order to understand what the generous appreciation of St. John must have been to this unknown Evangelist.

On the whole, then, we may conceive of Demetrius as an evangelist, a travelling evangelist or missionary, who was so moved by his love for Christ, and was animated by a spirit so disinterested and brave, by a zeal so ardent and sustained ; who was so faithful to the evangel he preached in the daily life which he daily risked that he might be true to it, as to win for himself the testimony of all who were capable of appreciating truth and goodness, nay, of the very truth itself, and of the Apostle who had more of the mind and heart of Christ than any other of the sons of men.

A very noble character, on which, simply by describing it, St. John has pronounced a very noble eulogium. And

if the ideal it presents is one to which we feel that we have not yet attained, or even one which we think beyond our reach, we cannot doubt either that, so far as it goes, it is a true ideal of the Christian life, or that we ought to and may so far reproduce it as to be bringing our daily life into a closer correspondence with the truths we believe. "Lives of great men all remind us" that our lives ought to be greater than they are, and should move us to make them greater. If we are not called to be, if we have not the gifts which would fit us for the work of, evangelists and missionaries, we are still called to be true to our convictions ; we are called to live a Christian, *i.e.*, a quiet, sober, and godly life, and so both to discharge the duty of bearing witness to the truth, and to enjoy the happiness of having the truth itself bear witness to us.

Let me also remind you that great as Demetrius looks to us—great in his disinterestedness, his devotion, his zeal—he was not a man of any great mark in the primitive Church. It is not some hero of distinction, some honoured and beloved man of spiritual genius, whom I have tried to place before you ; but a man of whom we should never have heard but for the prating insubordination of Diotrophes, whose "wicked words" and wicked conduct we can almost forgive since, but for these, we should have known nothing of the hospitable Gaius and the zealous Demetrius. There must have been

many such as Demetrius, many such as Gaius, in the Apostolic Church, if also many such as Diotrophes. And though, with Diotrophes and his life before us, we must not think of it as a company of saints who had "squared the circle of perfection," we may and must think well of a Church in which, if we find one prating lover of pre-eminence, we also find a host so generous, hospitable, and fearless as Gaius, an evangelist as brave and devoted as Demetrius, and, in St. John, the very Apostle of love and grace.

XVIII.

DIOTROPHES.

“ I wrote somewhat unto the church : but Diotrophes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words ; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth and casteth out of the church.”—iii. JOHN 9, 10.

BESIDES the light which this brief Epistle casts on the state of the Christian Church toward the close of the first century, it presents us with “the portraits in little” of three remarkable men—Demetrius, Diotrophes, and Gaius. We have already endeavoured to frame some conception of Demetrius, and found him an evangelist, a missionary, who, for the love he bore to Christ, had devoted himself to the service of the Gentiles, with all its toils, privations, and perils ; and was animated by a spirit so disinterested and brave, by a zeal so ardent and sustained, that he won for himself the testimony of all who were capable of appreciating truth and goodness, nay, of the very truth itself, and of the Apostle whom Jesus loved. We have now before us a much less wel-

come theme. We are to study a man of a very different and inferior stamp—the vain, irritable, and loquacious Diotrophes, whose religion seems to have been quite compatible with a slippery morality.

What exactly it was at which Diotrophes took offence, whether in the letter of St. John or in the conduct of Demetrius, we are not told ; but it is not difficult to offend a man who has an undue sense of his own importance, and whose self-love may be set on fire by any match, however innocently it may be struck. We do not know at all precisely what was the cause or the occasion of offence, but St. John clearly implies that it was some wound to his love of pre-eminence, his determination to stand first and to exact a homage he did not deserve. Possibly the Apostle's letter, the letter in which he commended Demetrius and his fellows to the confidence and sympathy of the Church, had not been addressed *to him*, or had not been carried *first* to him. Possibly Gaius had "received" Demetrius without consulting Diotrophes, or even after *he* had declined to receive him. He may have long cherished a grudge against Gaius as a rival too near the throne ; or Demetrius may not have shewn him the deference which he thought due to a person of his importance.

But, whatever the prick which his vanity had received, the character of the man comes out in his wholly disproportionate and extravagant resentment of the offence.

In his resentment, he sets himself against men far wiser and better than himself ; he imperils the peace of the Church : he diminishes its numbers and strength. Nothing less than the excommunication of all who had dared to differ from him, all who had ventured to receive the Evangelists whom he would not receive, and whom he had forbidden them to receive, would satisfy him. Not content with "prating" against the missionaries, and against the Apostle who had sent them, he "cast out" of the Church those who had welcomed and aided them. Tacitly at least they had questioned his claim to personal or official authority. His pre-eminence was in danger. And, losing all sense of proportion in his fierce resentment, he treats them as though they had been guilty of a mortal sin ; his wounded vanity landing him, as it often does land men, in the most bitter animosity and intolerance.

But the democratic constitution of the primitive Church would not permit one man, however eminent or pre-eminent, however high he stood in his own conceit or in the esteem of his neighbours, to excommunicate those who had offended him, simply because they had offended him. Before that extreme sentence was passed upon them, he must have won over a majority of his and their fellow-members to his side. And as he could not well plead against them a merely personal offence, as the Church did not feel the wound which inflamed his irritable self-conceit, he must have

taken a bypath to his end. He *may* long have cherished a factious spirit in the inferior members of the Church, the less wise and less good, by opposing whatever Gaius and his friends proposed, and finding plausible reasons for opposing them. And, indeed, a man of inferior gifts and of a spirit less informed by the grace of Christ, who *will* stand first, will put himself forward and attempt to rule a free Christian congregation, *must* take this course. He must play on the ignorance, and even on the piety, of those who follow him, must affect a superior wisdom, or a superior orthodoxy, or a superior devotion to the claims of its poorer and less instructed members ; must, in short, wield the common weapons of that loud-mouthed, irrepressible, and unsavoury creature, the religious demagogue. He will not let facts speak for themselves, but sets himself with his glib tongue to lick them out of their natural shape. He cannot suffer learning, wisdom, godliness, experience, to exert their natural and beneficent influence, but must at all risks counterwork that influence, and suggest plausible reasons for not yielding to it. How else can he win, and maintain, a pre-eminence he does not deserve, which, in his calmer moments, he may even know that he does not deserve? Tax him, press him close, and he will sometimes admit that he is not so wise, or that he "has not had the advantages," that he has not done so much for the wellbeing of the Church, or made so many sacrifices

in its service, as this man, or that ; but, nevertheless, it somehow happens that he is always in the right, and they are always in the wrong !

There is nothing in the Epistle to suggest that Diotrophes held unsound doctrinal views, or that he fell into what are called gross and open sins. Had he been unorthodox, indeed, or flagrantly immoral, he would never have gained that eminence in the Church which he insisted on converting into pre-eminence. All that he is blamed for is the conceit and self-assurance which rendered him impatient of rivalry or resistance, and set him on seeking power rather than usefulness. To stand first, not to do most, was his supreme aim and desire ; and as that is a false aim, the pursuit of which commonly leads men into evil courses very destructive to the peace and welfare of the Church, the Apostle's censure needs no defence. For the men who *take* the uppermost seats are generally men who should sit lower, and who are, sooner or later, compelled to take a lower place by the discipline of a kindly Providence. Any man who *will* have his own way is only too likely to come to a bad end. Any man who insists on the Church taking his way is only too certain to prove a blind guide, who will lead those who follow him into a ditch, and perhaps leave them in the ditch when he himself scrambles out of it.

But you may be asking : "*How* did Diotrophes induce

his fellow-members to follow his lead, since they must, most of them at least, have been good men who were not likely to excommunicate their fellows either for an excess of charity, or for wounding his self-conceit?"

And the answer to that question is suggested by St. John's words: "He receiveth not *us*;" "prating against *us* with wicked (or malicious) words." Yet Diotrophes could hardly have openly denied the authority of an Apostle so revered and beloved as St. John. No: but he may have questioned it indirectly. He may have dilated on the independence of the church, of every separate community of believers, on its competence and right to manage its own affairs, to appoint its own agents, to decide on its own course of action, and have asked whether they would suffer, whether it would be right to suffer, any outsider, however honoured and beloved he might be, to govern and control them. He may have pitted the venerated founder of the Asian Churches, "that blessed martyr," Paul, against John, who had only come among them when Paul had finished his course, and who had not sealed his testimony with his blood. He may have contrasted the teaching of St. Paul, which dwelt so habitually amid the mysteries and doctrines of the Faith, with the teaching of St. John, which dealt mainly with the sentiments it should inspire, the spirit of love and grace it should infuse. He may even have persuaded himself, as well as others, that John had taken

a new departure and was giving a new tone to Christian thought and life, and that the Church was in no small danger of being led away from its old standards, and thinking too much of the mercy and too little of the severity of God. He may have conceived, or have taught others to conceive, of the living Apostle, with his eternal cry, "Little children, love one another," as a fond foolish old man whose best days were past, who was giving a too sentimental tone to Religion, and making it milk for babes instead of meat for strong men. If he could not say bluntly, "I mean to stand first in this Church, let who will oppose me," or, "I hate Gaius and his pretensions to advise and rule," or, "I dislike Demetrius, and resent his lack of deference for me," he could at least appeal to the memory and teaching of their venerated Founder, and avow his preference of St. Paul's gospel over that of St. John.

And when once he had taken that line, it would only be too easy, as the letter of the Apostle and the mission of Demetrius were discussed, and there seemed some chance of his being defeated, for Diotrophes to slip into wild and angry words, to prate maliciously against Gaius and his followers, against Demetrius and his companions, against the holy Apostle himself, and to accuse them of faults and errors which, in his calmer moments, he would not have alleged against them.

For we must now remember that we are told *two*

things about Diotrophes. We are told not only that he loved to have the pre-eminence, but also that he was cursed with a voluble tongue, that he would "still be speaking:" for how often does a fluent tongue lead a man whither, in his reasonable moods, he would not go, and betray him into positions which he would not willingly have assumed? Mr. Talkative, as Bunyan calls him, may do, and often does do, quite as much harm as Mr. Illwill. A vain voluble man too commonly forgets to ask himself whether he has anything to say worth saying, or even whether he can trust himself to say it discreetly and well. It is enough for him to speak, to shew off, to force himself even on a reluctant audience, so that he may flatter his self-importance and gratify his itch for speaking. He does not consider whether he can bear to listen with patience and courtesy to the arguments on the other side, and allow them their due weight. It is his own way he wants, not the best way, not the way which will be most beneficial to others; and if he cannot get it by fair means, he will often stoop to foul or dubious means, stirring up division and discontent, prating with malicious words against those who oppose him when fair words will no longer serve his turn.

I have known more than one of these orators, and can see them in my mind's eye as I speak, taking the floor with a Sir Oracle air, brandishing their arms in the heat of their contention or swinging an eyeglass round a

finger to shew how much they are at ease, fussing with trembling hand among their "documents," which are generally in a hopeless confusion, and flinging themselves into their seats, after having poured forth their "infinite deal of nothing," as who should say, "Now that I have opened my lips, let no dog bark." And, indeed, who does not know, by constant and painful experience, that the men who are most ready to speak and advise are the men who are least worth hearing ; while those whom all would be glad to hear are as slow to speak as they are slow to wrath, some of them requiring a kind of pressure which almost amounts to a surgical operation before they can be induced to open their mouths in public ? Who does not know, by his own experience, that when once a man has *delivered* his opinion, however hastily he may have formed it, he has made it tenfold more difficult to judge and weigh the arguments which tend to disprove it, his self-love being now arrayed against them, and his natural dislike to own himself in the wrong ?

And if the itch of speaking is apt to lead on to the prating of idle, and even of malicious, words, the lust of power commonly leads to an abuse of power. "John, or Demetrius, has slighted me. Gaius does not defer to me, or my wishes. He has received strange brethren without consulting me, or when he knew that I had forbidden their reception. Nothing, then, shall induce me to receive them. I will move heaven and earth against them,

and against all who abet them, be they who they will : ” —when a man has once reached that point, and Diotrophes seems to have reached it, he is not far from any evil word or any evil work.

No punishment is more unwelcome to such an one than that with which John threatens Diotrophes : “ I will put him in mind of his words and his works,” bring him to book for them, in his own presence and in that of the Church. For those who speak untrue, disloyal, malicious words, and go about to create division and strife in a Church, or indeed in any community, take much pains to conceal them, and will often deny them if they can ; while, often, they really do forget the words they spoke in their more heated and voluble moods, and are shocked when they see the effects they have produced. They dislike nothing so much as being compelled to face their own whispers, and to see how they sound in honest and impartial ears, or even in their own ears now that their excitement and irritation have subsided.

Diotrophes, then, was a man who was not necessarily, or wholly, bad ; a man who may have had many good qualities and have done some service to the Church ; but his good qualities were blended with and their good effects vitiated by an exorbitant self-conceit and loquacity. So vain, so bent on influence and supremacy, as to be capable of the most cruel intolerance in asserting

his supremacy ; so talkative as to be capable of slipping into malicious and wicked words rather than hold his tongue or let the Church defer to other guidance than his own, he offers a much needed warning to many a man of "spotless respectability and worrying temper, of pious principles and worldly aims," of good intentions but a too voluble tongue ; who, because he thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think, flatters himself that he is serving the Church when he is only pandering to his self-importance and self-conceit, and is cruelly injuring the Church he professes to love.

"*Beloved*," exclaims St. John, when he had completed his miniature of Diotrophes, "*imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God ; he that doeth evil hath not seen God.*" And by this exhortation I do not understand him to imply that Diotrophes was an utterly bad man who had never seen God, never taken the first step toward a participation of the Divine Nature ; any more than he means that Demetrius, whom he forthwith begins to describe, was a man wholly good, in whom no fault could be found. But I do understand him to mean that a vain man, too fond of hearing himself talk, too bent on taking the foremost place, is closing his eyes against the heavenly vision, and may do as much harm as if his intents were bad. He does mean, I think, that mere words—whether the fluent professions of a Diotrophes or the earnest

preaching of a Demetrius—are of comparatively little account; that it is by a man's deeds that he must be judged: that if he does good, if his life tells for righteousness, charity, and peace, he is a good man; but that if he does evil, if the total effect of his life and labours is against righteousness and charity and peace, he is a bad man. The Apostle may imply that, as Demetrius was undoubtedly doing a good work, *he* was a good man; and that Diotrophes, in so far as he opposed and crippled that work, was doing an evil work and took his place among evil men. But what the Apostle would have *us* do is not so much to censure Diotrophes, and cast him out of the Church as unworthy of a place in it—*that* would only be to follow the bad example of the man himself; but to resolve that we will not follow his bad example, that we will not suffer our vanity to blind us to our own faults, our talkativeness, if we are talkative, to sink into slander and a malicious prating as injurious to ourselves as to our neighbours. If you can find any good in any Diotrophes you know, love it and imitate it; but do not follow that which is evil in him, or be too ready to make excuse for it because you find some germ of that evil in your own hearts: nay, turn his very faults to use, and let your dislike of them make you less self-opinionated, less wise in your own conceit, less willing to let your tongue become a fire. And as you cannot look at such men

as Gaius and Demetrius without seeing in them much to admire and approve, imitate them ; draw some touch of their generosity, their large charity, their disinterested devotion, their burning zeal, into your hearts and lives. Let your religion shew itself in deeds rather than in words, in a life conformed by the grace of Christ to the will of God, not in loud professions and loquacious speeches ; nor in an intolerant temper, and your readiness to sit in judgment on your brethren and to pass sharp and pungent verdicts upon them.

“Who is wise and understanding among you ? Let him shew, by his good life, his works in meekness and wisdom. But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart, glory not, and lie not against the truth. *This* wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is earthly, brutish, demoniacal. For where jealousy and faction are, there are confusion and every evil deed. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by them that make peace.”

XIX.

GAIUS.

“I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth.”—iii. JOHN 3.

WITH few but pregnant strokes of his pencil, St. John sketches for us, in this brief Letter, three men, of each of whom it is worth our while to form as clear a conception as we can — Demetrius, Diotrophes, and Gaius. Two of these have already engaged our attention. We found Demetrius to have been an evangelist, a travelling evangelist or missionary, who, for the love he bore to the Name (of Christ), had devoted himself to the service of the Gentiles, at the cost of many toils, privations, perils; and who was animated by a spirit so disinterested and brave, by a zeal so ardent and sustained, that he won for himself the testimony of all who were capable of appreciating truth and goodness, of the very truth itself, and of the revered and beloved Apostle John. Diotrophes, on the other hand, though he may have had his good points—and must have had them, or why should he have joined the Church at the cost

of breaking with the world?—was a man who carried the spirit and methods of the world into the Church, and was as self-seeking and self-confident as ever, although he now veiled his self-regarding ends under the forms and phrases of Religion. St. John only charges him with two faults, vanity and loquacity, and neither of these charges may sound very grave. But when a man is so vain, so bent on supremacy as that, to assert his supremacy and indulge his vanity, he is capable of cruelty and intolerance, casting out of the Church all who stand in his way or differ from him; when he is so loquacious as to be capable of prating wicked or malicious words rather than hold his tongue or suffer the Church to defer to any guidance but his own, his faults, however innocent they may seem, have grown and darkened into crimes as fatal to the health of his own soul as they are to the peace and welfare of the Church. And it was because the vanity and talkativeness of Diotrophes, long cherished and long indulged, had reached this exorbitant and criminal pitch that St. John rebuked and threatened to expose him.

We are now to study the character of Gaius, the sincere and generous host of Demetrius, the quiet but sturdy opponent of the intolerance and tyranny of Diotrophes; and the study should be very welcome to us since, if he has not climbed so high as the fervent

and zealous Evangelist, still less has he fallen so low as the prating lover of pre-eminence who would not defer even to the Apostle himself. He is more on our level, it may be, than either of the other two, and reveals a strain of character which should not be beyond our reach.

With his first touch St. John strikes the ground-note, or the key-note, of the whole music which went to make up the character of the man. Gaius was one who "walked *in truth*," and so walked in it that men "bore witness to his *truth*." The Greek word here rendered "truth" might, if the change were worth making, be rendered "reality." But neither word, and indeed no one English word, conveys, or can convey, its whole meaning and force, the entire circle of its implications, to those who are ignorant of the Original. Even in a paraphrase I am only too likely to omit some shade of significance which I should be glad to include. But if I say that Gaius was a true man, a genuine man, a real man, whose life was all of one piece, whose daily conduct was the practical outcome and inference from the truths he believed, I may perhaps help you to some conception of the Apostle's meaning. Still he implies much more than he says, and we must try to recover his implications also.

We may, and must, infer from his stress on the word "truth" that Gaius cared more for deeds than for words ;

that there was not that unhappy divorce between his professions and his actions, his creed and his conduct, which we may see in Diotrophes and recognize only too clearly in ourselves. *He* did not look one way, and walk another. He did not say one thing, and mean another. He did not approve the better, and follow the worse, course. There was no hypocrisy, no insincerity, in him. He, the whole man, was "*in* the truth;" or, as we might phrase it, the truth was *in him*, had taken possession of him, reigned in his heart, ruled his life; and that so evidently that, though he must have had his slips and faults, men felt as they looked at him, "This man is true, true to himself, true to his creed, true to his Master; we know where to have him; we can trust him, and foretell his course. Come what may, no danger, no allurement, will draw or drive him from his stedfast and habitual round, or make him unfaithful to the faith and service of Christ."

And we may also infer that Gaius was not one who would bring the spirit and methods of the world into the Church. Diotrophes might be as selfish, as opinionated, as ambitious, as subtle and scheming, as he was before he had entered the Christian fellowship, and might pursue his ends with the old eagerness and conceit and loquacity, pushing himself forward, and keeping a foremost place in it, by the very means by which he had sought eminence and success in the world. But that

was not possible to a true man, a genuine Christian, such as Gaius, who really believed the truth as it is in Jesus, and cared for nothing so much as to be conformed in heart and life to the gentle, lowly, and unworldly Son of Man.

Nor, again, could a true man, in the Apostle's sense, yield to that still more subtle and fatal temptation by which those are overcome in whom religion degenerates, as it seems to have done in Diotrophes, into mere ecclesiasticism or sectarianism ; who consider themselves good servants of Christ, and even pillars of his Church, if they make a stand for orthodoxy, or busily engage in the management of Church affairs, and set themselves to promote sectional or denominational interests. True religion does not consist in, it is not always consistent with, an eager devotion to doctrines and sacraments and Church business, but in a repentance which is ever growing more deep, in a righteousness ever growing more pure, in a charity ever growing more warm and large. A too keen and exclusive interest in the outside of the cup and the platter is as dangerous in the Church as it is anywhere else. And it *has* become too exclusive and keen when we care comparatively little for the food which ought to be in the platter, and the wine which ought to be in the cup, or so partake of them as that we do not grow in wisdom, in holiness, in love to God and man.

From all these faults and errors Gaius was free. Of an incorrigible and losing honesty, it was his distinction that he was *in* the truth, and that he was *walking*, *i.e.*, growing and advancing, in the truth of Christ; that the truth was making him true—true in thought, in motive, in word, in deed, insomuch that when the eye saw him, it bore witness unto him.

St. James has taught us (Chap. i. 27) that unworldliness and charity constitute the true ritualism of the Christian Church, that these are the main forms in which a pure and undefiled religion now finds expression. And the charity of Gaius was as conspicuous as his unworldliness. Not only had he received and entertained strangers, who were also brethren, setting forward Demetrius and other travelling evangelists on their journey; he continued to receive and serve them even when Diotrophes forbade him, and had persuaded the Church to excommunicate those who ventured to receive them. He could do no other; for he walked in truth. He believed that all who were in Christ were his brethren, even though they were strangers to him; and he was bound to treat them as his brethren, even though, for being true to his convictions, he was cut off from the body of Christ.

What it was exactly at which Diotrophes took offence whether in St. John or in Demetrius and his fellows, we are not told; but, as I tried to shew in my last discourse,

it seems probable that he objected to the missionaries from Ephesus because they were strangers, or because they did not defer to him as he thought they should do to a man of his consequence. Nor are we told how he induced a majority of his fellow-members to follow him, and to cast out those who would not follow him ; but it seems probable, as I also tried to shew you, that he appealed to their love and respect for the memory of St. Paul, the venerated founder of their Church, and turned their love of St. Paul into a jealousy of St. John's authority, if not into a suspicion of his teaching. When the beloved Apostle complains, "Diotrophes receiveth not *us*," but "prateth against us with malicious words," we cannot but suspect that Diotrophes had set the less wise and experienced members of the Church on asking : "What right has John to interfere in our affairs ?" or even, "Is not John departing from the lines of thought and action laid down by Paul, and preaching another gospel than his ?" And if these questions were once asked, and answered as Diotrophes would have them answered, it is easy to see that Gaius' fidelity to the truth would be heavily taxed. But, because he was in the truth and walked in the truth, he had room in his heart for all who taught, and loved, and served the truth. St. John was as dear to him as St. Paul, and the truths taught by the one Apostle elicited a response from him as quick and fervent as the truths taught by

the other : for it is not men who are *in* the truth, but only those who hang on to its skirts, who are afraid of any truth with which they are not already familiar. Nor was he to be talked out of his loyalty to truth, or threatened out of it. Truth in every form was welcome to him, let who would teach it, let who would prate against it. It was his *duty* to receive brethren even if they were strangers. It was his duty to listen to all who had the mind of Christ, even though they knew more of that Mind than he did. And he must do his duty, even though for doing it he were cast out from a fellowship which was very dear to him.

A certain genuineness and wholeness, then, a certain staunchness and loyalty, combined with great breadth and tolerance, seems to have been characteristic of the hospitable and kindly Gaius. He was in the truth. He walked in truth. There was a clear accord, a fruitful harmony, between his principles and his practice which gave unity and force to his life. He could be true to truth, come whence it would. He could be true to men, even when they were reviled and thrust out of the Church. He could be true to the claims of Christian charity, even when his fidelity would shut him out from communion with men whom he loved and had served. In fine, he was a man who stood on his own feet, used his own eyes, and was faithful to the inspirations of the Divine Comforter and Guide who had taken up his

abode with him. And, in St. Paul's striking phrase, he "*truthed it in love*," cherishing and exhibiting a charity from which I suspect that not even Diotrophes himself was excluded, and which utterly refused to let Demetrius go even when world and Church combined against him.

Now this large, stedfast, yet gentle loyalty to truth is as essential to a genuine, a real and strong, Christian character now as it was then ; a loyalty which can not only stand against the narrow intolerance of a Diotrophes, and sympathize with the disinterested zeal of a Demetrius, but can also bring the large generous truths in which we believe to bear upon our daily life and practice, and constrain us to receive and set forward all who are serving the truth, "that we may be fellow-workers with the truth" they teach. Before we can put ourselves even on the modest level of Gaius, we must ask ourselves, "What risks have we run, what sacrifices have we made, what pleasant fellowships have we put in jeopardy, that we might stand up for unpopular truths, or back up the men who were enforcing and defending them ? What toil and pain have we undergone that we might bring our daily conduct into harmony with our convictions ? What good causes have we served and set forward, in the persons of their advocates, that we might have our share in the good work ?" If we cannot give a fairly satisfactory answer to such questions as

these, I do not say that our faith is vain, or that we have no religion ; but I do say that our religion has not the genuine ring, that we have not compelled men to bear witness to our truth, much less compelled the truth itself to bear witness to us.

There are men, no doubt, who have a terrible struggle to wage in the sacred precincts of their own soul before they can make religion the ruling influence and power of their lives ; and of these, perhaps, we must not expect much public service until the issue of the inward conflict has been decided ; though I believe that, even in this inward personal war, they would be greatly aided were they to make it more impersonal, and to care and contend for the salvation of other men instead of simply fighting for their own hand. And there are other men who are so engrossed and exhausted by the labours and cares, the occupations and irritations, of their daily business that they have as much as they can do in bringing the spirit of religion to bear on their daily task, and have neither leisure nor energy left for works of public usefulness. But, remember, those who are thus occupied and absorbed by business duties or household cares, in their strenuous endeavour to bring their daily life under law to Christ, are building up a character which is possibly the best contribution *they* can make to the service of the Church, and are hourly bearing witness to the elevating and ennobling power of the truth.

Remember, we are not told that Gaius talked Diotrophes down, or that he made a masterly defence of St. John, or even that he took a prominent part whether in managing the affairs or conducting the services of the Church. All we are told of him is that he shewed much sympathy with the strangers whom John had commended to the Church, that his sympathy took very practical forms, and that he exercised it at the risk, and perhaps at the cost, of losing the sympathy of brethren who were not strangers, and with whom he habitually worshipped. He may have been, he may have done, far more than this, for we have only a momentary photograph of him in a single attitude ; and for myself I sometimes think of him as the *doing* deacon of the Church, in opposition to Diotrophes, the *talking* deacon. But all this is mere conjecture. All that we know of him is that he was a genuine man, of fine character, who once ran a grave risk that he might be loyal to his principles and convictions. He may have been one of the quietest of men, with no gift for Church work, and no ambition beyond his gifts. But no one could really know him without feeling that he was a true man, a true Christian, whose piety was not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And I suppose we have all met such men, and found it good to be with them ; men with whom we felt that we must talk on higher themes than commonly haunt our lips, and carry ourselves with a simplicity and

a sincerity beyond that we commonly shew ; men who cared little for show and form, who did not deal in glib pious phrases or sectarian catch-words, but who all the same made us feel that they were nearer Christ and more like Him than many a loud professor of religion.

My brethren, the discipline of life, and the advantages and privileges of the Christian life, have been wasted on us if, whatever our gifts or our lack of them, whatever our opportunities or our lack of them, we have not built up for ourselves, or are not building up, such a character as this ; if, whether we do, or do not, strive and cry, and cause our name to be heard in the streets, there is no quiet sanctuary within our souls, from which a light is sometimes seen, and prayers and songs are sometimes heard, and a hallowed influence constantly proceeds, to prove, to all who are capable of receiving proof, that Christ has an altar and a throne within us, and is the true Lord and Ruler of our life. If we are really walking in the truth, we *must* in various methods, some of them very quiet and simple, but not therefore the less effective, bear witness to the truth which guides and shapes our ways.

XX.

LOT'S WIFE.

“Remember Lot’s wife.”—LUKE xvii. 32.

BUT *what* are we to remember? What is the precise point which the example of Lot’s wife is adduced to illustrate? Obviously, it is the peril of looking back, of hanging in poise, of halting between two, in the critical moments of life, in hours of decision.

Our Lord is speaking of his advent to judge the world, whether that Advent take place when a great city, a great empire, a great economy, passes away in blood and fire and smoke; or in those crowded moments of our individual lives in which we have to make an instant and pregnant decision between the warring affections and desires of the soul that will give a ply or bias to our whole after life. At such moments Christ “comes” to us, comes to force us to decision, to compel us to choose between the higher and the lower aims of human life, and to shew what manner of spirit we are of. He descends—so the context implies—with all his train, and

flashes by us with lightning speed. If we so love Him, and all that He stands for and represents to us, that at once, without any hesitation or delay, we choose the better part and join his train, we not only escape condemnation ; we save, we quicken, our life into life eternal. But if, as in the days of Noah, and again in the days of Lot, we are so busy in eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, so preoccupied with the cravings and affairs of this present world, or so drowned in self-indulgence and sensuous desires, as that "the things of the spirit" have little charm and value for us, and we let the critical auspicious moment pass ; if, as the heavenly pageant flashes by, we do not lift up our heads and cry, "Thine are we, O Christ, and on thy side, thou Son of Man," we miss our happy chance, and lose our life instead of saving it.

Nay, more : if we only *hesitate* ; if, being on the house-top, instead of running down the outer staircase in our eagerness to obey the divine summons, we go down into the house, to carry away with us some hidden treasure ; or if, being in the field, we hurry home, to snatch up some precious toy that we hold too dear to be left behind ; or if, having responded to the call, we look back on what we have left with a strength of desire which betrays a heart whose affections are not "set" on the best things : if, in short, we are "men of two minds,"

and do not give the better mind full sway, why, then, we lose not only that which we have so unduly and untimely loved, but life, our true life, itself; for our life does not consist in the abundance of things which we possess, but in such a love and pursuit of truth and goodness, righteousness and charity, such a fellowship with Him who is the Source of all truth and goodness, as constrains us to cleave to Him at all risks, and makes us count the world well lost if only we may be found in Him, sharing his righteousness, and animated by his love.

Now such crises as these may be rare—Coleridge affirms that they are rare, that "*seldom* comes the moment in life" so charged as "to make a great decision possible;" but they come to us all: crises in which we have to make an instant choice between evil and good, between that which is sensuous and temporary and that which is spiritual and eternal. And our choice is our doom, our judgment. By every such decision we betray our ruling aim, and adjudge ourselves worthy, or unworthy, of eternal life. It is to help us in these choices, to guide us to a wise decision, to warn us that it must be prompt, whole-hearted, irrevocable, that our Lord bids us "remember Lot's wife."

When the hour of judgment struck with her, she made—possibly by the persuasions of her husband and children, possibly by the terrors of the moment, she was

constrained to make—the right choice. But her heart was not in it, or, at least, her whole heart. And what wonder? The command of Jehovah was clear and imperative indeed ¹: “Up, take thy wife and thy daughters, lest thou be consumed;” and, again, “Escape for thy life; *look not behind thee*, neither stay thou in all the Circle; escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed.” But they had grown wealthy at Sodom, and had risen to respect and honour. Her children had been bred, if not born, there; some of them had married there, and so settled down into the life of the city that they had refused to leave it. Even Lot himself had “lingered” when the command first came, and had shewn himself so loath to leave a place endeared to him by many attachments and associations that the angels had to take him by the hand, “the Lord being merciful unto him,” and drag him out of the city. What wonder, then, if so soon as they had reached a halting-place, and could look back from the hill of Zoar, and see the terrible volcanic outburst by which the guilty city was consumed, that his wife fell back behind him, “and *looked back* from behind him”?

Who can tell by how many emotions she was drawn to violate, or even led to forget, the divine command, “Look not behind thee”? Curiosity, awe, terror, may all have impelled her, as well as love for the children left

¹ Genesis xix.

behind and the place in which she had known so many happy prosperous hours. But, happily for us, the word and laws of God hold on their course, we do not escape their sweep and stroke, however innocent our intentions may be, or however strangely compounded of ill and good. The motives of Lot's wife may have been innocent enough, or even laudable: for what of wrong is there in loving a place in which we have lived, or even in an overmastering desire to turn and look at a great and terrible spectacle? and how can a mother's heart but go out to her children when they are in deadly peril? But however innocent her motives may have been, or however strangely innocent may have been blended with wrong motives and desires, she had to take the consequences and bear the penalty of her action all the same. Smothered with the sulphurous smoke of the volcanic flames, just as the elder Pliny was suffocated with the fumes of sulphur and bitumen at the destruction of Pompeii, she fell into a heap, and was gradually encrusted with the saline particles of which the air in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea is still full. Such heaps, or lumps, formed from spray, mist, and saline exhalations, which have gathered round a core of fallen trees or beasts, are still common on the shores of that Sea of Salt, and always have been common. Josephus identified one of them with Lot's wife more than eighteen centuries ago, as the Arabs do to this day.

We need not see a miracle, therefore, in the death of Lot's wife, but an illustration of natural laws. Nor need we assume that, because she suffered such things as these, she was a sinner above all other women, or that her fate in the world beyond death at all resembled her fate in this world. She may be a very sufficient and wholesome warning for us without all that, a warning against indecision and a double mind. Nay, I think that, without all that, she may be a *more* wholesome and effective warning. For she may serve to remind us, not only of the peril of indecision, and a divided heart, but also of the strange mysterious way in which the laws of God exact their penalties of us, whatever, and however innocent, the intention with which we violate them. The good and well-meaning have to pay these penalties, no less than the bad who mean ill. The best and kindest actions may entail them upon us as well as the most selfish and the worst. You may sit up every night for a week to nurse a sick mother or a dying child, after having worked all day for their support ; but your health suffers from the strain as surely as if some ill or sordid motive had kept you from your bed. You may rush into or through the flames to rescue a helpless victim from the fire ; but the flames will as surely burn you as though your errand had been to steal your neighbour's gold.

And it is well that the divine laws do hold on their course, however undeserved the suffering they inflict.

For, if they did not, who could be sure of anything? how could we calculate and forecast the issues of any of our deeds? The whole frame of human life would be thrown out of gear, and we should be reduced to a hopeless inutility and confusion, if we could not count on the invariable action of natural laws, even though their action may seem at times cruel and unjust—if water did not drown, if fire did not burn, if smoke did not smother, and steam did not expand.

But though we may admit that Lot's wife was impelled to look back by perfectly natural emotions, some of which were innocent or even laudable, we must also admit, I think, that these innocent emotions were blended with emotions which had some taint of guilt and disobedience. For the word used in Genesis (xix. 26) when we are told that she "*looked* back" on the burning city is a different and much stronger word than that used two verses lower down, where we are told that Abraham "*looked* toward Sodom and Gomorrah." Abraham's look was only a rapid and terrified glance; but the look of Lot's wife was—so the word implies—a look "of deliberate contemplation, of stedfast regard, *of strong desire*." She looked back wistfully, longingly, as one whose treasure was in the City, and whose heart was there also. She would fain have gone after her heart had she dared. She would rather have stayed amid all the sins of Sodom, if she might have carried on her old

easy life in it, than have climbed the mountain, to commence a new life and to dwell apart with God. Her look was an unspoken prayer ; and her prayer was answered : she knew "the misery of a *granted* prayer." She lingered behind as one who would fain stay behind ; and she *did* stay, though only as a heap of salt, and of salt that had lost its savour.

There is a grave warning for us here ; and for this warning also we may well "remember Lot's wife." If we suffer her, she will speak to us not only of the peril of a divided heart, but also of the peril of prayer—the peril of cherishing those ardent desires which are often our most fervent prayers.

Some of you may remember that Emerson commenced his career as a Unitarian minister, and that the first sermon he preached had Prayer for its theme. The three divisions of his sermon (and this is all we are told of it) were : (1) *All men are always praying* ; (2) *All their prayers are answered* ; and (3) *Therefore we ought to be very careful what we ask for*. And in the history of Lot's wife, or of her lingering longing look, we may find an illustration of each of these remarkable divisions, and an explanation of assertions which may perplex the immature mind : viz., that "all men are *always* praying," and that "*all* their prayers are answered."

Prayer need not be vocal. You may pray without falling on your knees or opening your lips. "Prayer is

the soul's sincere desire," the soul's strong and ruling desire, whether "uttered or unexpressed." And as all men have and cherish strong desires, even though they do not put them into words, there is a sense in which it is true that "all men are always praying." And these ruling desires have a strange power, a strange trick, of fulfilling themselves. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he," says the Wise Man. And it is equally true that as a man *desireth* in his heart so is he. Our several characters are but the sum of the ruling aims and desires which we have cherished and pursued. Desire breeds action, and action habit, and habit doom. We *are* what we would be, although we are *not* what we would be. That is to say, our present character is the result of the cravings and desires we have cherished and indulged, though they do not correspond to the highest ideal which, in our better moods and hours of recollection, we have been able to frame. For *this* is an ideal which we have not always held, or to which we have not always been true. If at times we have desired "good things," at other times we have desired "evil things," or have even mistaken evil for good. And thus we have arrived at that complex, and often contradictory, state in which good and evil are so strangely blended that, while we *are* what we have desired to be, we *are not* what we would be, and even find that we cannot do the good we would, while the evil we would not, that we do.

But if these strong ruling desires are our real prayers, and *have* this strange trick of fulfilling themselves, then it is true, as Emerson says, both that *all* our prayers are answered, and that we should be very careful what we pray for—very careful, especially, over our *unspoken* prayers. For when we *speak* with God, if we speak at all intelligently and sincerely, we realize his presence; and in the light of that pure Presence we sift, and purge, and raise our desires; we ask for that which is really good, or for that which we honestly think it will be good for us to have; and we at least try to subordinate our wills to his. But when we pray without words, when we simply cherish a strong desire which, though it may spring from nothing better than a sensual or a selfish craving for ease or pleasure, has yet all the force of a prayer, we may forget the pure and awful Presence in which we always stand; we may fail to test our desire by the high standard of his will; we may make no effort to sift, purge, and raise our souls; and before we have recognized our evil plight, we too may know the misery of a granted prayer, and be suffocated by the world's breath and encrusted with its eating and consuming salt.

There are, therefore, at least two occasions on which you ought to "remember Lot's wife," on which you ought to recall and accept our Lord's warning.

1. In those crises in which you have to make an

instant choice between good and evil, there being no leisure for deliberation or debate. That there are such critical occasions in the outward affairs of life Shakespeare has taught us when he said, or made Brutus say,

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

And who does not know that there are similar, and equally urgent, occasions in the history of the soul ? When a great temptation meets you, in one of those perilous conjunctures of opportunity and inclination, when the appetite for gain or self-indulgence is strong and you have what seems a favourable and secret chance of gratifying it, a chance which, if not seized at the moment, will be gone beyond recall ; if you stand before it with a doubtful mind, a divided heart, drawn this way by conscience and that by concupiscence, then remember Lot's wife : remember our Lord's warning that, if at such moments of decision we decide wrongly, we miss a happy chance of serving Him, of joining his train, of saving our souls from an irreparable loss. At such moments I have known young men saved by the voice of a kindly bystander who, seeing the struggle in their face, has said, " I would not do it, if I were you, Sir," or by a sudden recollection of a pure and loving home, and of the grief and shame with which it would be

darkened were it ever known that they had yielded to a temptation so base. And how could they help being saved if they remembered that the kindest Heart in the universe would be pained by their fall? if they could hear the tender voice of the Son of Man, saying, "Son, remember; remember what misery, what loss, other tempted souls have sustained by yielding to the very temptation before which you stand, and do not thus pollute, and impoverish, and cast away your soul."

So, too, when good influences are abroad, and your soul is deeply moved, moved to yield to them once for all, and yet you shrink from breaking with the world and from committing yourselves wholly to Him who would fain lead you to a new and higher life, remember Lot's wife, and what a happy chance she threw away by her indecision, by her reluctance to break from the old and to give herself to the new and better way of living to which she was being led: remember, and do not look back. "Backward looks betray backward longings, and beget backward steps." An immediate choice is demanded of you; see that you make the right choice. Such a moment as this may be long in recurring. Precisely such a moment can never recur. When the powers of the kingdom of heaven are next brought to bear on you, and you are next moved to seize upon it with energy, you will be another man; you will be a worse man, harder to move and less likely to yield, if you let

the present moment pass unused : for "use doth breed a habit in a man," and a habit of resisting good influences just as surely as any other. If any of you, therefore, are now moved to take the warning and accept the invitation of Christ, to break away from your old world of evil or indifferent ways and to set out on a new better way, to throw in your lot with Him, to seek Him first and his righteousness, do not let the auspicious moment slip, do not suffer the opportunity to be lost ; commit yourselves to Him, and accept the life He offers you.

2. Finally : as our unspoken prayers are often our most sincere and fervent prayers, and in some cases our only prayers, "remember Lot's wife ;" remember that these prayers are always answered. It may seem a light thing to frame wishes which are never formulated into supplications ; but it is not a light thing. It is by these wishes, these strong ruling desires, that character is formed, that doom is shaped. When Lot's wife "looked back" she little thought, I suspect, that the stedfast regard, the fervent desire, of her look had all the force of a prayer. Yet *we* can see how the desire grew out of her past life, that it *was* a virtual prayer, and how completely and miserably it was granted. And it is with us as it was with her. Every wish we cherish—I do not say all the wishes that pass through our minds, but all to which we give a home in the mind—leave delicate but deep and ineradicable traces on us. They

inspire our actions. They form, or help to form, our habits. They modify and control all our after wishes and desires. And thus they give shape and colour to our whole life, and to our ultimate fate. The question is not whether we shall or shall not pray—every man is always praying: but what our prayers shall be like? The question is not whether God will answer our prayers—prayers are always answered: but how any man dare pray lest the answer should come and find him unprepared for it!

“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint”! Men *are* always praying; it is the fainting, the failing, against which we have to be on our guard—failing to ask for the right thing, the best thing, or failing to ask with the due earnestness and importunity. As we “remember Lot’s wife,” we learn from her, not that we ought to pray, but that we should take heed how we pray, that we should be “very careful what we ask for;” that we must seek, as well as ask, if we are to find; that we must knock with an importunity which will not be silenced or denied, if the gate of the heavenly treasure-house is to be opened unto us.

XXI.

THE QUICKENING OF THE SOUL.

“Whosoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it ; but whosoever shall lose shall preserve it.”—LUKE xvii. 33.

AN ingenious Rabbi suggests that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar, or heap, of *salt* because she had *sinned through salt*. For on the night before she was destroyed, when the angels, disguised as men, came to tarry in her house, “she went out to the neighbours, and said, Give me salt, for we have guests.” But this she said, not because she lacked salt, but because she wanted to let the men of Sodom know that she had guests, and to deliver them into the lawless hands of those wicked men.

We have no need, however, as we saw last Sunday, and therefore we have no right, to think so ill of her as that. Holy Scripture does not charge her with any participation in, or any sympathy with, the sins of Sodom. Its sole charge is that, when fleeing to Zoar, she looked back on the doomed city, although she had been warned not to look behind her ; and looked back with eyes so full of longing and desire that her look amounted to an unspoken but fervent prayer. She may

have had many quite innocent motives for her guilty action, the action which cost her her life. Her look may have been prompted by curiosity and fear ; for who, in her place, would not have looked back on a spectacle so strange and grand and terrible as the volcanic outburst by which the Cities of the Plain were destroyed? The prayer in her look may have been prompted by the anguish of a mother's love ; for some of her children had remained in the city she had left, and were sharing its doom : and who that has felt, or known, a mother's tender clinging love will overmuch blame her for yielding to an instinct so keen and strong, at whatever risk ?

While we can find such innocent and natural motives for her backward look, we need not hunt for sinister motives. Nor need we assume that because, while she stood and looked, she was suffocated by the bitter smoke of the burning cities, she was condemned by God as a sinner above other women. Neither fire nor smoke nor any other natural force, has the slightest respect for our motives. If we come within their range, they strike us down, however innocent or laudable the motives may have been which put us in their power. Lot's wife, looking back on the terrible fate of her children, and wishing that she had shared their fate, or that she could have averted it by suffering for them, was not, necessarily, one whit more guilty than many a mother who

has found it hard to give her dying child to God, hard even to pardon God for having taken her child from her ; or than David when he cried, " O Absalom, my son ! Would God that I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son ! "

Nor does the innocence, or comparative innocence, of her motives at all detract from the force of our Lord's warning, " Remember Lot's wife." It, rather, adds to its force. For, in that case, it reminds us that, however natural may be the motives which hold us back from responding to his call, when He summons us to an instant decision for Him, our holding back may be just as fatal, or just as injurious to us, as if our motives had been unnatural and vile. He had just warned his disciples that a time was at hand when they would long for such days as they had often spent with the Son of Man while He was on the earth. Such *days*, He seems to imply, would never recur, let them long as they would ; but *moments* of revelation, moments therefore of decision, might still come to them ; moments in which they would grow conscious of his presence and hear his voice. And the question in his mind was whether they would be ready for Him, whether *men* would be ready for Him, when He came, whether they would listen and respond. They might be eating and drinking, buying and selling, building and planting, marrying and giving in marriage, as in the days of Noah when the flood came

and swept them all away, or as in the days of Lot when "it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all."

Not that there is anything *wrong* in eating and drinking, buying and selling, building and planting, or in marrying and giving in marriage. These are all necessary, honest, and even honourable occupations, without which the world could not go on. Yes; but if we are so occupied and pre-occupied with them as that we have no eye for that which is higher than they, and no ear save for the noises and festivities of a busy world; if even the presence of *Christ* cannot attract us, or *his* voice reach our hearts; if in those crowded and pregnant moments of decision in which we must choose between good and evil, or between the best things and things of inferior value, we make the wrong choice because our hearts are set on our home comforts or our business interests: if, to use St. Paul's words, we who have wives cannot be as though we had none, and those who weep cannot be as if they wept not, and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and those that buy as though they possessed not, and those who use this world as not using it to the full,—why, then, all these necessary, innocent, or laudable occupations become dangerous to our true life, if not fatal to it; and we lose our life by the very means by which we seek to preserve it.

Whereas if we use the world without being absorbed in it ; if we not only buy and sell, for instance, but buy and sell with an integrity and a consideration for the interests of others which convert our buying and selling into an ethical discipline ; if, moreover, we refuse to devote all our time and energy to mere buying and selling in order that we may leave force and leisure for self-culture, for study, for worship, for teaching and serving our neighbours,—why, then, no doubt, we may miss some chances of enlarging our dealings and making gain, but in thus losing our life we shall preserve and increase it : it is only the lower and more fugitive part of our life that will suffer loss ; the nobler and more enduring part will make great gain. Above all, when Christ comes to us in those moments of decision in which we have to make a choice between good and evil, or between the best things and things of inferior worth, we shall be in little danger of making a wrong choice. For we shall have practised ourselves in preferring spiritual things to carnal, good things to evil, the best things to less good ; we shall have taken our ply and formed a habit of sacrificing the lower to the higher ; and it is *habit* by which most of all our choice is determined in those quick moments of decision in which there is no leisure for deliberation and debate.

The peril of indecision, and the power of habitual and strong desire in determining our choice in moments in

which decision is imperative—this was the moral which I drew last Sunday from the warning, “Remember Lot’s wife.” And in the main, as I have now tried to shew you, it is our Lord’s own moral. Virtually He says, “Remember Lot’s wife,” *for* “whosoever shall seek to gain his life (or “soul”) shall lose it ; but whosoever shall lose shall preserve it.” That is to say, In those critical moments in which Christ comes to us with power, flashing into our souls as the lightning flashes through the sky (Verse 24), if we hesitate, if we have cherished desires adverse to his claims upon us ; if we have so riveted the affections of the soul on some lower form of good than that which He offers us that, without it, our life hardly seems worth having, we are only too likely to make a wrong choice, and to lose our life in the attempt to save it, or to save what we deem essential to it. While, on the other hand, if we have formed the habit of so valuing that which is best and noblest, all for which “Christ” stands to us and represents, that we willingly quit all else to be true to Him, no critical conjuncture will find us unprepared ; we shall instinctively make the right choice, since to be found in Him, and with Him, and for Him, has become our supreme aim and desire.

Even the paradoxical form in which our Lord casts this truth has become familiar to us ; for I have often spoken to you of other forms of a paradox which seems

to have embodied one of his standing thoughts, since it falls again and again from his lips. When we considered his "Gospel to the Greeks," and heard Him say, "He that loveth his life (or soul) loseth it; and he that hateth his life (or soul) in this world shall keep it unto life eternal," I tried to shew you that "just as the man who is always thinking of his health is likely to lose it, and to sink into a confirmed hypochondriac or invalid, so the man who is always studying how he may save his life (or soul) is only too likely to lose his life, or all the sweet uses of his life;" and so too the man whose main thought and selfish preoccupation is simply how he may save his own soul is only too likely to lose it, or to find it degenerating till it is hardly worth saving.¹ When, again, we studied our Lord's promise to his disciples, "By your constancy ye shall gain (or acquire) your souls," I tried to shew you how every man has to gain possession of his spiritual faculties just as he has to acquire possession of his mental faculties, and learn how to use them; that every man *must* acquire his own soul, learn what it is capable of, and train it to its highest use by a stedfast pursuit of that aim, and by fidelity to it at any cost or sacrifice.²

My text is only a new variation of this familiar theme. And I do not know that it would have been worth our while to revert to the theme in this new form of it, if

¹ *Expositions*, Vol. II. Discourse xix.

² *Ibid.*, Discourse xi.

it did not present us with a new image, or suggestion, which will repay any study we may expend upon it. For when our Lord says, "Whosoever shall seek to gain his life (or "soul") shall lose (or destroy) it, but whosoever shall lose shall preserve it," the verb rendered "preserve" means much more than merely "keep" or "save." It means, as you may see from the margin of our Revised Version, "*save it alive*," or, still more literally, shall "*give birth to it alive*:" i.e., he shall *quicken* it, shall give new and more and higher life to it. It is *the quickening of the soul*, the adding to the volume and power of its life, that our Lord had in mind.¹ And this is a thought worthy of all meditation, since it allies itself in the most intimate way with our daily conduct and experience.

What, then, are those critical moments in which choice is imperative on us? They are, as we have agreed,² moments of strong temptation, or moments of great exaltation.

¹ In all the passages to which I have just referred (Matthew xvi. 25; Luke xvii. 33; xxi. 19; John xii. 25), as in many others, our translators, both of the Authorized and the Revised Versions, render one and the same Greek word (*ψυχή*) now by "life" and now by "soul" as, in their judgment, best suits the context. This departure from their usual rule will not perplex any thoughtful reader if only he remember that, in the mind of Jesus, the only true and proper life of man is *the life of the soul*, and that it is of this that He is speaking throughout.

See last Discourse.

(1) Every man, as St. James reminds us, has his own lust, passion, craving. And "every man is tempted when he is drawn aside by his own lust, and enticed." Suppose that such a moment has come to you. Your special lust, the passionate desire or craving to which you are most prone, has drawn you into some spot, just off the path of duty, where you meet an opportunity of indulging it. Nobody will know; nobody will be the worse for what you say or do—or so you persuade yourself. By a momentary deviation from the course of integrity or of purity, you may make much gain or get a great pleasure. And your choice must be prompt, immediate, or the opportunity will be gone. For the moment, and under the pressure of your passionate craving, you may feel as though your very life depends on your allowing yourself the indulgence you so keenly crave, that nothing else is worth a thought, that if you cannot have *this* life is not worth living. You yield. You suffer your lust to bring forth sin. And when the deed is done, and the flush of excitement is past, do you fail to find that sin, when it is mature, bringeth forth death? If nobody else is the worse, are not *you* worse? Are you not conscious that the whole tone of your life is lowered, its volume lessened, its current polluted? Are you not aware that you are less sensitive to all pure and high spiritual influences, more at the mercy of the cravings and appetites which you have indulged, less

able to resist the next temptation? What have you done? You have wronged, injured, impoverished your own soul. What other proof, then, do *you* need that, in seeking to gain your life, you have lost it—lost hold and command of it, lessened its force, lowered its level?

On the other hand, if you resist the temptation and overcome it; if, because you have formed a habit of listening to the voice of conscience rather than to that of passion or desire, you are able to stand in your quick moment of trial, are you not conscious, when the moment and the pain of the moment have passed, that your life has gained new force and vigour? If, because you recognize your frailty, your heart is full of humble gratitude to the God who has enabled you to stand, and you go on your way with songs of praise, do you not feel that you have acquired a new and warmer love of all that is good, that the best things have grown dearer to you, and more desirable, and more within your reach? that the volume of your life has been enlarged, its tone raised? What further proof do *you* require, then, that, in losing, you have quickened your life, your true life, the life of the soul?

(2) Turn our theme round; look at its other side. Moments of unusual exaltation are as critical and decisive as moments of strong temptation. When the truth as it is in Jesus has been brought home to you—or, indeed, when any great truth, or unselfish impulse,

or generous aspiration has been so brought home to you that your spirit within you has been deeply moved ; when the spiritual alternative has been impressively placed before you, and you have felt that you *must* choose between the law of Christ and the law of the world,—if you have made the wrong choice, have you not *known* that it was the wrong choice? If, because you could not discard your selfish and worldly aims and fling your whole heart into the service of God and his Christ, you have let this happy chance slip by ; if, *i.e.*, you have declined to make the love and pursuit of truth and righteousness and charity your ruling aim, but have, although so deeply moved, continued to put ease, comfort, success first ; if you have thus reversed the true order of things, subordinated that which is spiritual to that which is sensuous, and that which is eternal to that which is temporal, have you not presently found that your life was the poorer and the weaker for your decision ? that it had declined to a lower level, a narrower range, and drew you down more and more toward the plane at which truth itself may seem to be a liar, and all goodness of doubtful worth or too high to be attained? If so, you know what it is to lose your life while seeking to gain it ; for there is a sense in which a man's life does consist in that which he desires and to which he cleaves.

On the contrary, if you have seized upon and redeemed

the opportunity ; if you have yielded to the gracious influences of the moment and to the inward voices which urged you to respond to it ; if you have dedicated yourself afresh to the service of God, and have been able to count the world well lost that you might win Christ and be found in Him : if, in a word, you have preferred spiritual things to carnal and eternal to temporal things, and have thus maintained the true order of the soul,—has not your soul been quickened within you ? has not your choice given it new life, swelling its volume, augmenting its vigour, elevating its tone ? Resting on the housetop, or working in the field, you have heard the voice of Christ ; and, not conferring with flesh and blood, your whole nature has instantly responded to his call, so that you have not gone down into the house or back from the field to fetch away some lesser and inferior good, but have wholly committed yourself unto Him : and your soul has grown strong and pure and glad within you.

Is not our paradox true, then ? Have you not found it true that whosoever, in these critical moments of decision, seeks to gain his life loses it, but whosoever is willing to lose it quickens it into life eternal ?

Christ came to Peter at the moment in which Peter fell. Peter had *then* to make an instant choice, to decide whether he would own Christ or disown Him. And he made the wrong choice. Seeking to save his

life, he lost it, and went out to weep bitterly for the life, or even for the soul, he had lost, yet was to find again. You remember, every one remembers, the story of his temptation and his fall. But have you observed, do you remember, that, in the temptation before which he fell, there was another, a more subtle and strong temptation ; and that into this lower deep he did *not* fall ? When he had denied his Master, his temptation was to lose all faith in the Master he had denied, and all hope for himself ; to assume that his Master could never forgive him, much less recover him from the depth to which he had fallen. But, with him at least, denial was not allowed to sink into despair. "I have prayed for thee," said Christ, "*that thy faith fail not* ; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The prayer was answered. Much as his heart misgave him, Peter's faith in Christ, in the pity and grace of Christ, did not fail. If by yielding to his first temptation, he impoverished his life, by resisting the second and greater temptation he quickened and enriched his life, his soul gathered such strength that he was able to strengthen and confirm the wavering faith of his brethren.

And so we are led to the practical lesson and conclusion at which I have been aiming. I spoke to you, in my last Discourse, of the infinite value of these critical moments of decision, and urged you not to suffer one of them to pass unused. But now I supplement that

warning by reminding you that, even if you *have* suffered such moments to pass unused, you must not lose faith, you need not despair. Peter fell before one temptation, and yet did not fall before the next and stronger temptation. Thomas missed one happy chance, the chance of shewing that he could believe even where he could not see ; but he had many such chances afterward, and did *not* miss them. And if any of you are sorrowfully conscious that you have not been true to that better life of which Christ is the pattern and the source, if you know and lament that you have often suffered the world and the flesh to be too much with you and too much for you, and that you have thus weakened and impoverished your life ; or if you feel that you have often been deeply moved by the power of his truth or the appeal of his grace, and yet have not quickened and released new powers of life within your souls by an instant and whole-hearted response to his claim and call, still do not despair. Christ comes to you once more to-day ; once more He asks you to seek first his kingdom and righteousness, to make life in Him your ruling and supreme aim ; and many as are the opportunities you have missed, and much as you may have impoverished your life by missing them, yet if you now respond, if you commit yourselves to Him, if you seize and use the new chance He offers you, all will yet be well with you ; and you may yet find your life quickened into life eternal.

XXII.

DIVINE GUESTS.

“Jesus answered and said unto him : If a man love me, he will keep my word ; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”—JOHN xiv. 23.

IT is St. John who reports most of the *Conversations* in which our Lord took part. But for him, indeed, we should hardly have known how great, as a talker, Jesus was, how He elicited the best thoughts and deepest aspirations of the men and women with whom He conversed ; and then met their thought and satisfied their aspirations. *He* did not reserve Himself for great occasions and a large audience. Many of his finest and noblest sayings were uttered in the ears of few, or even of one ; as, for instance, when He talked with Nicodemus, or with the woman of Samaria, or, as here, when He talked privately with the Twelve. If the audience were but “fit,” it mattered nothing to Him how “few” it was.

We are apt to think and speak of this Chapter as part of the great “discourse” of Christ after He had

instituted the Supper, in which we still commemorate his crowning act of love. But it is a conversation, rather than a discourse. Thomas, and Philip, and Judas—the true Judas, not the false—all take part in it as well as Jesus; and it is in answer to the question of Judas that He utters the great and gracious saying of my text.

He had been telling the Twelve that, though the world would no longer see Him, *they* should see Him; that He will still manifest Himself to *them*, though He can no longer manifest Himself to the world at large. And Judas is perplexed; he cannot make out how this new method of manifestation is possible, or what has happened to necessitate the change. Jesus, as He Himself affirmed before the High Priest (John xviii. 20), had ever “spoken openly to the world, in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together;” in secret He had spoken nothing. Was He, and why was He, about to change his method? “Lord,” asks the wondering disciple, “what has come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” Even yet the Disciples had not realized that He was about to leave them—to leave the world which had been so inhospitable to Him, to ascend up on high, and thence to shew Himself only in and through hearts prepared to receive Him by love and obedience. And so He has to explain to them once more that He is going

to the Father ; that He is about to leave a world which hated Him ; and to manifest Himself in future only to those who loved Him and kept his word, that they might carry Him and his word out into all the world. But to *them*, to as many as love and obey Him, He promises not only his own presence, his own love, but also the presence and love of his Father : *we* will come to them, and not only come, but make our *abode* with them.

If we have any love for Christ, then, the promise is to us, and to our children. And as we listen to it, and enter into its gracious significance, our first emotion is one of unutterable thankfulness and joy. We say : "What a gracious, what a delightful, promise ! It guarantees all that we can ask or desire." And, perhaps, it is ; perhaps, it does.

"Perhaps !" you exclaim. "If you love us, and love the Word you preach, how can you take that cold, hesitating tone ? What could be more delightful than to have our Father and our Saviour always with us ?"

And I can only plead, in reply, that I have found many things which sounded very delightful to the ear of hope, not wholly delightful when they became facts in our spiritual experience. Most Christian persons, for example, assume that they want to go, that it will be delightful to go, to heaven. And yet how grave they look if the doctor hints that there is any chance of their going there soon ! how they weep and lament when

their friends are actually taken where it is so delightful to go !

Hence when I hear any of them greeting such a promise as this with rapture, or speaking of it as *so* comfortable, *so* delightful, I do not admit that I shew any want of love for them, or for the Word I preach, if, before I rejoice in their joy, I pause to consider, and ask them to consider, whether they are quite prepared to receive as their guests and inmates the Father almighty and the Son of his love ; whether they have fully counted the cost of offering hospitality to these Divine Guests.

It *is* a great promise ; but are we great enough to receive it, and to welcome its fulfilment ? Is there nothing questionable in our habits, or even in our ruling tone and bent—no baseness, no frivolity, no worldliness, no selfishness, no inner vileness—which might well make us shrink from a Presence so pure and august ? Are we really prepared, do we really want, to have God with us, in the home and in the world, in our business and our amusements, that He may see all we do, hear all we say ; and that, in all, we may look up into his face for guidance, for sympathy, for approval ?

To have the eternal Father and the ever-living Redeemer of our souls with us, and within us, as we pass across the shifting sands of Time—with no home and no rest unless we can find our rest and home in *them*—is in very deed the only adequate source of strength and

joy. But, if they come to us, they come to take the first place in our hearts, not the second, much less the last : if they come, they come to make the heart in which they find a home a temple, into which nothing sordid or selfish or unclean may enter ; come, therefore, to slay all our sins and sinful affections and desires ; come, even, to take away all comforts, all successes, all habits, all joys that are transient, imperfect, unreal, or inimical to our true and lasting welfare.

Are you quite prepared for all that, my friends ? And if you are, do you suppose that it will all be simply delightful ? The end of it, indeed, will be delightful beyond all telling : but will there be no trouble by the way ? That the infinite God will deign to be my guest, that He will reveal Himself to me as my Father and my Saviour ; that, under all the changes and sorrows of time, I should be assured that He loves me, and should know, amid all the fluctuating and despairing moods of the soul, that He is saving me,—this is a most gracious promise ; there is none like it, none so sustaining, purifying, ennobling : but is there no touch of awe and mystery and discipline in it, to make me grave as well as glad when I receive it ? thoughtful and resolved when I fling myself on it and commit myself to it, rather than light-hearted and gay ?

How full it is both of grace and awe an illustration or two may bring home to us. There was once a woman,

a woman of Samaria, with whom Jesus lodged for a few minutes, accepting her hospitality, if at least we may dignify a cup of cold water with that name ; as we may : for has not He Himself told us that even this poor gift shall in nowise fail of its reward ? And as He sat with her by the well, and drank of her pitcher, how graciously He talked with her, pouring into her single ear sayings so pregnant with thought and so sublime as that they have raised the whole level of human thought, and the world will never let them die : sayings, for example, such as this ; “ God is Spirit ; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” Did He not in such sayings as this manifest both Himself and his Father to the frail sinful woman ? And yet did she find the process altogether delightful ? Was it these great sayings, was it this sublime manifestation, which most of all impressed and moved her ; which persuaded her that He was both a Prophet and the Messiah to whom all the prophets bore witness ? By no means. What most of all impressed her we learn from her invitation to the men of Samaria, “ Come, see a man who *told me all things that ever I did*”—told me all things, though of herself He had told her only one ! What touched her most closely was his command, “ Go, *call thy husband*, and come hither.” At that word her whole evil and dissolute life flashed before her eyes, and her heart was wrung with a saving shame.

Not delight by any means, then, but shame and remorse for her manifold sins, as she saw them reflected from his pure face, was the first effect of Christ's coming to her, and revealing to her the Father who was to be worshipped neither on Gerizim nor at Jerusalem, but in the sanctities, the love and obedience, of a pure and dutiful life. And yet who does not see that she could only become clean by making a clean breast to Him of her sins; that only as she passed through this cloud of shame and sorrow, and penitently acknowledged her transgression of the law of womanhood and the law of God, could she become a new creature, with a clean heart and a right spirit? Who does not see that, for her at least, delight in the presence of Christ, in fellowship with the Father and the Son, could only be reached as she passed through a saving agony of contrition and self-abasement?

And who may not gather hope for himself from a due consideration of her experience? Sinful as she was we may be, and, our conditions and opportunities fairly allowed for, far more sinful. And hence, if God and the Son of God should "come" to sojourn with us, we may at first be overpowered by a sense of our impurity and uncleanness. If they should "abide" with us, this sense of sin and shame may be renewed again and again. But it is not by cloaking and dissembling our sins before Almighty God that we can be cleansed from our sins.

It is only by being made to feel them more and more deeply, and to confess them with a more and more contrite heart, that we can be absolved and freed from them, and enter into the peace of his forgiving and redeeming love.

Take another illustration. There was once a nation with whom God "abode" for two thousand years, speaking to them and revealing his will by his servants the prophets, and inviting them to maintain a direct and unbroken communion with Him. Though they never prospered save as they recognized and rejoiced in his Presence, they never cared much to have Him with them, so terrible was the contrast between his holiness and their unholiness. And at last, when He sent his Son, full of grace and truth, to tabernacle with them, when, as we believe, He Himself came and dwelt among them in the person of his Son; when, *i.e.*, God came nearer to them than ever, and revealed Himself to them in more gracious and inviting forms, they rejected Him with every sign of loathing and scorn.

Did He, therefore, reject and abandon them, and blot their names for ever from the book of life? Nay, but in his love and in his pity He died for them, and died to take away their sin in rejecting Him—with such Divine art did He betray them for their good. They took their own wild wilful way; and yet it proved to be *his* way after all, his way for their redemption and the redemp-

tion of the world. He would not so much as blame them, or have them blamed. With his dying breath he cried, "Father, forgive them ; they know not what they do." He would not even admit that it was they who took his life from Him. "No man taketh it from me," He said, "but I lay it down of myself, and lay it down that I may take it up again, and abide with them, and bear with them, and win upon them, till I have redeemed them from their sins, and have put my law into their minds and written it on their hearts."

And so *all* Israel, old and new, was saved. Not saved as yet indeed ; nor do we yet see how all are to be saved. But, as we look back, we see all along the line of those who would not have Him to reign over them a long array of elect, *i.e.*, of loving and childlike, souls, of clear and great spirits, who learned to delight in Him, through whatever pangs of shame and penitence they rose to their rest in Him. While the great bulk of the people were stiffening into a Sadducean scepticism or a Pharisaic bigotry, He was training a few prophetic souls in every generation to receive Him, to carry his words—nay, to carry *Him*—in their hearts ; and to give Him to the true Israel, the elect spirits of the world, to the open and receptive spirits of all who desired the truth. For, by other means, He had all along been training other men, in other lands, for a faithful reception of Him and of his Word. If they were not all Israel who were in the

Israelite fold, He had "other sheep" who were not of that fold, but were nevertheless of his flock. And these too, as He said, He must bring in. Hence the elect Jews, the faithful Remnant, to whom his word gave life, went out into all the world and preached his gospel to every creature. In the person of their successors, they still carry on the work and service of his love. And in the end, so we are assured both by his Spirit and by his Word, all Israel is to be saved, the fulness of the Gentiles is to be brought in, and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd. The long agony of the ages is to close in the birth of a new earth and a new heaven, in the gift of a new heart and a new spirit to all the sons of men. Christ is to see of the travail of his soul ; and, having drawn all men unto Himself, is to be satisfied.

This is the crowning illustration of the redeeming ways of God. And, surely, it brings home to us, as none other could, at once the awfulness and the grace of the great promise of my text. What have not God and the Son of God had to endure that they might dwell with the world ! What pangs of shame have men had to suffer, what agonies of contrition, what a discipline of chastening and rebuke, have they still to endure before they could, or can, abide with God ! And yet is not the end worth it all ? When the end is reached, and we have learned to delight ourselves in Him, shall we not forget the anguish for joy that a new world, a new race, has

been born? born to God, and to fellowship with God ; and therefore born to a peace past all understanding, to a joy unspeakable because so full of glory ?

But we need not wait for the end. The promise, great as it is, may, so far as *we* are concerned, be fulfilled now and here. Our Lord is not speaking wholly or mainly of the future when He says, "If a man love me, he will keep my word ; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." To some of us Father and Son *have* come again and again ; come, at first, to calm and curb our hot passionate spirits, to control our rebellious wills, to rebuke our habitual sins ; but come also to cleanse us from the stains of guilt, to purge us from the love of sin, to redeem us from our bondage to evil habit, to lift us out of our worldliness and selfishness, to set new and higher aims before us, to kindle new and purer affections within us. We have been put to shame indeed, but it has been a saving shame. If we have been shaken at times with a passion of contrition, we have also felt the healing power of forgiveness. If we are still far from all perfection, none the less we still cherish the hope of being made perfect. However we doubt our love for God, we do not doubt his love for us, or are not suffered to doubt it for more than a moment ; not because we deserve it, any more than Israel or the world at large deserved it, but because we know that God *is* love, and that He cannot deny Him-

self. And so, though this promise is still full of awe for us, it is also full of grace. We find in it a sentence of death on all that is sinful or imperfect in our nature, and we know that to part with some of our sinful habits and imperfections must be hard for us and full of pain ; but we also know that we can only reach our proper perfection and blessedness as we are constrained to give them up ; and, for the joy set before us, we are content to endure—in our best moods, we despise—the pain.

Nor is there any reason, save one, why all men should not enter into the fruition of this great and sustaining Promise. It is made to “any,” *i.e.*, to every, man. That is to say, it is made to any and every man who is willing to love and to obey. “If any man *love* me, and *keep my word*, . . . we will come to him, and make our abode with him.” This is the sole condition. And the condition is not artificial or arbitrary, but natural and inevitable. For how can God’s presence be any blessing, or at least any happiness, to you, if you do not love Him, and love to have Him with you ? How *can* He abide with you, if your will is opposed to his ? or how, at least, can you take any pleasure in having Him with you ?

But if you really and honestly desire to have God always with you ; if amid all the changes and sorrows of time, and under all the fluctuating moods of your own heart, you care to feel that He is your Father and loves you, that He is your Redeemer and is bent on saving

you ; if, in a word, you long to be redeemed from all care and all fear—here is the offer of his grace and love to you. He Himself tells you that He *is* your Father, and that his love can never change ; He Himself assures you that He *is* your Redeemer, that He has taken away your sin, and that, in proportion as you are prepared to receive and welcome Him, He will come and abide with you, that He may work in you both to love and to do all the good pleasure of his will. You have but to open the doors of Love and Duty, and through these open doors the God of all grace and consolation will enter in, and so dwell with you that, both here and hereafter, you may dwell with Him.

XXIII.

THE MAN WITH A PITCHER.

“And the day of unleavened bread came, on which the passover must be sacrificed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and make ready for us the passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we make ready? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house whereinto he goeth. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them; and they made ready the passover.”—LUKE xxii. 7-13.

THE incident recorded in these Verses is invested with an air of mystery at variance with the habitual simplicity and sincerity of Christ. There are men of a habit so furtive and secret that straightforwardness is almost impossible to them. They are for ever “fetching a compass,” looking one way and rowing another, and would hardly care to reach the end they most desire unless they had secured it by stratagem. But there was nothing furtive or indirect about *Him*. He went straight to his ends with the simple fearlessness of one who has no private end to

serve, and who, so far from finding gain in others' loss, is willing to lose all for their good. And yet it is impossible to deny that there is an appearance of indirectness, an air of secrecy, in the way in which He indicates to his Apostles the goodman at whose house He had arranged, or determined, to keep the passover. *He* knew the man's name well enough ; and so, in all probability did *they*. For the man was one of his few disciples in Jerusalem, as we learn from the salutation He puts into the mouth of the Two who are to meet him. They are to say to him, "*The Master*"—*i.e.*, the Teacher, the Rabbi, of whom you wot, whom you acknowledge to be *your* teacher and master—"bids you shew us the room in which he is to eat"—in which He has arranged with you to eat—"the passover with his disciples."

Jesus knew the man's name, then ; and so did the Twelve. For one of them, St. Matthew (Chap. xxvi. 18), reports our Lord as saying, "Go into the city to *such a man* ;" and the Greek phrase for "such an one" is that used when the writer, or speaker, knew, but did not care to disclose, the name of the person referred to. Why, then, does our Lord make a mystery of the goodman's name? Why, instead of telling them to whose house they were to go, and mentioning a name they would instantly have recognized, does He send them from Bethany to the great and crowded city of Jerusalem to meet a man bearing a pitcher, and to follow whither-

soever he may lead. They might meet—on this night, as we shall see by and bye, they were sure to meet—hundreds and thousands of men—men, not women—carrying jars of water from the public fountains, or from “Siloa’s sacred stream.” How could they be sure that they should light on the right man, or sure of recognizing him if they did? And why should they be sent out on an adventure when it would have been so easy, by speaking a single word, to save them from all perplexity and all risk?

The answer to that question has commonly been rendered thus. Jesus was about to be taken from the disciples who had hitherto looked to Him for guidance and protection. Before He left them, He wished to comfort them by giving them one more proof of his prescience and power; by shewing them that He knew what was taking place *at a distance*, that He could foresee what would take place *in the future*; that He could so order even the minutest details of human life as to make them subserve the purposes of his wisdom and love. He does not tell them to whose house they are to go, nor where it stood, in order that they may see that, while at Bethany, He knows what is going on at Jerusalem, knows even what *will be* going on an hour or two hence; what “the goodman” will be doing, where they will find him, and that He can so time and arrange their actions and his that they and he will be brought together

at the very moment and under the very conditions which He had anticipated. And He took this strange indirect course with them, because He wanted to convince them that He could both see and guide them when He should be removed from them ; because He wanted to teach them that He would still be with them when they would think of Him as absent and distant, that He would still be watching over them, and directing them in all their ways in that future to which they looked forward with so much dread because He would no longer be with them.

Now I am far from denying that this is the true solution of the mystery, and indicates the true, and most beautiful and consolatory, lesson we are to learn from it. All I contend for is, that it is not reached in the right way. For Jesus did not *invent* difficulties to shew how easily He could overcome them ; nor did He *make* the path of his disciples dubious and perplexing to them even to teach them how wise and good He was. His character and his method alike warrant us in assuming that there must have been some clear, natural, and sufficient reason in the circumstances in which He and they were placed that compelled Him to give them a secret sign instead of a plain address. At all events, what we know of Him—of his simplicity, sincerity, straightforwardness—should lead us to look for some such reason in the conditions of the hour, and decline to believe that

He was simply *exhibiting* his prescience and power, without reason and without cause.

And if we set out on that search, we shall not have to look far for the reason which induced and compelled Him to take a course in which He *appears* unlike Himself, but *is*, indeed, in a most true accord with Himself.

The secret is latent in the Verses which immediately precede my text, and will become plain and clear to us so soon as we realize the incident they record, and connect it with the incident before us.

From these Verses, then, we learn that the Jewish Sanhedrin feared a tumult if they arrested Jesus while Jerusalem was thronged with Galilean and other strangers, over whom they had little influence and less power. Determined to slay Him, they were "seeking how they might put him to death" without exciting and exasperating the people. "Not during the feast," they said, "while all these strangers are about who run after Him, lest they should turn upon us and rend us; but before, or after." But in vain did they take counsel together. He that sitteth in the heavens laughed at them. For it was precisely during the Feast, and not before or after, He had determined that our Passover should be sacrificed for us. When Judas offered to betray the Nazarene into their hands secretly, "in the absence of the multitude," they could not resist the temptation, and thought his offer, I dare say, a manifest interposition

of Providence on their behalf. But while they meant to use Judas for their ends, God was using both him and them for his end—to effect, to carry out, the counsel He had afore determined.

Probably Judas, with the calculating selfishness which often accompanies the religious temperament, had all along intended to use Jesus for his own ends—to secure his own advancement, to gain wealth, power, distinction in the kingdom which the Son of Man was to set up. But now that he saw Him turn from a kingdom to a cross, he resolved at least to get back into the favour of the Chief Priests and the Pharisees. So he makes “a covenant” with them, just as Jesus was about to make the new covenant with his disciples and to promise *them*, in a higher form, all that Judas craved. The one covenant is a dark and sinister shadow of the other. And in this secret covenant with the priestly rulers we have, I think, the reason and the explanation of the secret instruction which Jesus gave to his two disciples.

For the Lord Jesus, who had long known who it was that should betray Him, knew now that the traitor was only watching for a secret and safe opportunity of effecting his purpose. And He would do nothing to help him; nay, He takes thought and pains to hinder and hold him back, even deviating from his habit of open and straightforward dealing with his Apostles. He has determined, He has arranged, to eat the passover with

them at a certain house in Jerusalem. The eve of the day on which the passover lamb must be killed in the temple, and all the preparations for the Feast must be completed, has arrived. He must send to remind his friend in the City of the arrangement they have made, to assure him that He intends to abide by it ; and He must also despatch messengers whom He can trust to get the lamb slain by the priests on the appointed day, and to make all ready for the last occasion on which He will break bread and drink wine with his disciples.

But why must the messengers be men whom he could *trust* ? why does He not tell the whole band of his disciples what He is about to do ? why have recourse to a sign ? *Simply because, if Judas should come to know of this quiet meeting in a retired house, he would feel that his opportunity had come, and proceed to deliver Jesus to the priests "in the absence of the multitude."* It was consideration for the traitor—it was, at least in part, to hold him back from his enormous but not "unparalleled" sin—that Jesus departed from his usual open course, and made a secret of the place where He was to keep the feast. Only on the eve of the day on which the Passover was to be eaten did He send to prepare for it. Even then He selects for this confidential office the two Apostles who loved Him most and on whom He could most rely—Peter and John. And, even to them, He mentions no name, gives no address. When they ask,

"*Where* wilt thou that we make ready?" He does not reply, "At So-and-So's, in such and such a street." He gives them a sign. When they enter the city they will meet a man bearing a jar of water; which *may* mean that the first man they met on entering Jerusalem, or the first man whom they knew to be one of his disciples, would be the man whom they were to follow, and in whose house they are to make ready. But, in either case, *they* cannot foresee, though Christ can, who the man is to be. And so, even if Judas should suspect their errand, and try to worm out from them where they are going, they cannot, however unconsciously, betray their Master to him; they cannot tell him what they do not know: they can give him no answer that would serve his turn. In his love and in his pity—his love for them, his pity for Judas—to save *them* from a mistake which they would have found it hard to forgive, and to hold *him* back from a sin which man has not forgiven even yet, though Christ Himself may have forgiven it long ago, He rendered it impossible for them to betray Him to Judas, and for Judas to betray Him to the priests.

He was not *exhibiting* his power, then, nor *displaying* his more than human wisdom. He was using his prescience for their good, and that He might finish the work which his Father had given Him to do.

And yet, if He had not been able, when need was,

to see what was passing at a distance and to project Himself into the future, how could He have foreknown where the goodman would be, and how he would be occupied, at the very moment when John and Peter should enter the city, or how so time and guide their steps that they should fall in with him, and not with some one of the many other men who, at that very hour, would be occupied with the same task?

For though, among the Jews, it was not the men, but the women, who commonly went to draw water from the public fountains, yet, on *this* night, Jewish custom ordained that, before the stars appeared in the sky, every head of a household should repair to a fountain from which He could draw pure and living water to mix with the flour from which the unleavened bread, eaten at the feast, was to be made. Hence, in the crowded city of Jerusalem, by the time the two Apostles reached it, there would be hundreds, and even thousands, of men bearing jars or pitchers of water through the streets to their several homes.

Here, then, in this historical fact, we may see how great must have been the prescience, or the power, of Christ—that He could so time, or so order, the steps both of the Apostles and of the householder in the distant City as that he and they should come together just at the right instant, and at the very spot at which, unknown to them, their paths would intersect each other.

We may also see why, having resolved to give a sign rather than a plain direction, He chose *this* sign rather than another. It was not by accident, by chance, or because He wanted to shew how wise and foreseeing He was. His choice was guided by the custom of the hour, by what He knew the goodman would be likely to be doing when his messengers reached the City.

In saying this, however, in shewing how natural and reasonable it was that He should choose this sign rather than any other, we in no measure detract from the prescience of Christ. It would puzzle even a mathematician to calculate how many chances there were against such a forecast as this falling true. According to Josephus, the population of Jerusalem at Passover-time was to be counted by the million. There are not, I suppose, so many people in London who habitually go to church on Sunday morning as there were in Jerusalem nineteen centuries ago who punctiliously observed all the customs of the Passover ordained by Jewish law and tradition. But if, on some fine Sunday morning, you were sent to London from a distance which would take you an hour to cover, with no more definite direction than this: "When you have entered into the city there will meet you a man on his way to Church, with a prayer-book, or a hymn-book, in his hand ; follow him, and he shall shew you where you are to go," should you be very sanguine of finding your way

to the right place, of lighting on the right man at the first cast?

Surely, then, Peter and John in after-days, when their Master was no longer with them and the future looked all dark and threatening, as they reflected on this experience of Christ's presence with the absent, of his power to forecast, if not to shape, the future,—surely they must have drawn from it a strong argument for trust and hope, and have said within themselves, "*He* knows what is coming to pass, though we do not. He is with us, though we do not see Him. He is guiding our steps, though now, as then, we have to walk by faith and not by sight." And surely we, if we believe in Christ as the Lord and Ruler of our lives as well as the Saviour of our souls; if we believe that the Father has committed all "judgment"—*i.e.*, all authority and rule—to the Son, may draw from this incident a similar argument for hope and trust. We may infer that even when He seems to be absent and distant from us, and though we are in fear or in doubt about what the morrow may bring forth, *He* sees and foresees all which is hidden from us; and that, unconfused and unembarrassed by the myriad chances and mischances of life, He is guiding us in all our ways, if only we are busy on his errands and are striving to do his will.

Indeed the more we reflect on this incident, the more we shall find in it to meet our wants and banish our

fears. For it teaches us that, even when He seems most unlike Himself, our Lord is most truly Himself, and is leading us to our desired haven, though by ways we know not, and which do not seem likely to lead us there. It teaches us that his prescience extends to the minutest details, as well as to the main lines and critical occasions of life; that absolutely nothing which really concerns us is overlooked or forgotten by Him, no, not even the pitcher, or the cup, of cold water which we need to slake our thirst, or are carrying to a neighbour who needs it even more than we do. It teaches us that if we love Him, and are bent on serving Him, He will save us from those innocent, because unconscious and unintentional, transgressions of his good will for us which must inevitably inflict their proper punishment upon us, however guiltless we may be—just as He saved Peter and John from innocently betraying a secret to Judas which he would have turned to evil account. It teaches us that even when we are already traitors to Him in our hearts, when we are meditating some sin which will cast us from his grace, He will do all He can, short of forcing our will, to save us from our sin; that He will place hindrances and impediments in *our* way as He did in the way of Iscariot, and will not abandon us to our evil heart until, against all the remonstrances and pleadings and warnings of his love, we overleap all hindrance, and plunge into what we know to be a path of death.

Time will not permit me to dwell on these lessons, to draw them out and apply them to the various conditions, experiences, and wants of men. And what need is there to dwell upon them when no sooner do we hear them than they commend themselves to us as lessons which meet the very infirmities and fears by which we are beset and disturbed? Every man who has set out on the spiritual life at once recognizes their value, and appreciates the comfort they freely yield.

But there is one lesson, not quite so near the surface, though even this can hardly have escaped you, on which, since it meets a very common want, I must at least ask you to reflect for yourselves. For, finally, this incident suggests why much that we crave to know is hidden from us. How often in the conduct of our life, in its greatest as well as in its smaller choices and decisions, do we look back on them, and say, "O, if I had but known!" or look forward to them and sigh, "O, if I could but know!" We have to determine, we have even to act, before we can see, or foresee, what many of the consequences of our determination, or our action, will be. And, afterwards, when the results of what we have done fill our hearts with grief and apprehension, we say, "I would not have done that if I had known to what it would lead. Why did I not know? Why was I not forewarned?"

And the answer to this question often is: It is better

that you should not have foreseen ; better that you should have been left to act on principle than on a calculation of consequences ; better that you should walk by faith, and not by sight : better even that you should be allowed to fall into errors and mistakes, and have to eat their bitter fruit, and so be taught the seriousness and responsibility of life and trained for freedom of choice and action, than that every step should be precisely marked out for you and all its results be clearly revealed. For it is *thus* that God emancipates us from the leading-strings of infancy, and trains us into men, and strong men, in Christ Jesus.

But, sometimes, the answer is : You are called to walk as in darkness, trusting in a higher Wisdom than your own, because that Wisdom is so much higher than your own that as yet you cannot be trusted with its secrets without injury or peril, because the very knowledge you crave would be a temptation to you and a danger. When Christ gave a secret sign to the two chief Apostles, the Ten may have asked why *they* were not permitted to know the secret confided to the Two ; the Two may have asked why Jesus did not tell them what they were to do *clearly*, why He sent them out on a perplexing and dubious adventure instead of telling them plainly where they were to go : while no doubt the traitor, Judas, thought himself hardly used because what he so much wanted to know was carefully con-

cealed from him. Yet, as we can see, it was in mercy and love that Jesus so far departed from his usual course as to invest a perfectly natural and simple errand in a cloud of mystery which baffled all prevision ; we can see that He was bent on holding Judas back from a conscious and wilful crime, and on saving the Eleven from unconsciously betraying Him into the hands of his enemies and theirs.

Shall we not believe, then, that the knowledge which we sometimes crave, but which He withholds from us, is withheld for our good—that we may be taught to walk, and practised in walking, by faith in Him, by the light of those great and clear conceptions of duty which He has implanted in our hearts ; and that we may be spared temptations which it would be hard for us to meet, and saved from sins into which we might, consciously, or unconsciously, fall ?

Let us put our trust in Him ; for so long as He sits on the throne of life all is, and must be, well with us.

XXIV.

THE COMING DAWN.

A CHRISTMAS HOMILY.

“Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman saith, The morning cometh, and also the night.”—ISAIAH xxi. 11, 12.

“The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.”—ROMANS xiii. 12.

THE Hebrew Prophet, oppressed with many forebodings, stands, in spirit, on his lofty watch-tower at Jerusalem, and looks and listens round the whole horizon, to catch any movement, any omen of change, that he may learn what it is which is coming on the sons of men. Already, while gazing stedfastly to the north, he has seen the Persian host plunging into the darkness which enshrouds Babylon, and, after a long interval of keen suspense, issuing from it with jubilant cries of victory; and he knows that the doom of the great Babylonian tyranny has come (Verses 1-10). But, now, a voice, quick and urgent with anxiety, strikes upon him from the south. On the sentinel rock, which stands in front of the Red

Range of Edom, he dimly descries a watcher like himself, a representative of the Edomites—those wild brave sons of Esau who, living by the sword, had been “eaten by the sword” for many long years; but who, under all the oppressions of defeat and vassalage, have cherished an indomitable love of freedom. It is impersonated Edom which asks of Isaiah, “Watchman, what of the night?” *i.e.*, “What hour of the night is it, and what does it look like?” but asks in the tone of one tossing on his bed, worn out with pain and weary with longing for the day; so that his question really means, “Is the night well-nigh gone? Will it soon pass? Is there any sign of dawn?” But the Prophet has no clear vision of the Edomite future. All he can see is that, if a dawn of freedom and hope is rising on them, it will soon be swallowed up in darkness. And hence he replies, with all the brevity, but with all the ambiguity, of an oracle, “The morning cometh, but the night cometh also.” Yet, because he would not cut off even the most implacable enemies of Israel from hope, he adds, “If ye will inquire, inquire; return, come again.” Beyond the night there may be another dawn of hope. Let them not altogether lose heart, then, but come and inquire again, when he may have a clearer vision and a more welcome answer to give them.

The Christian Apostle, bent on employing every argument for holiness and charity to which he can lay

his pen, sums up his exhortation to the disciples at Rome with an appeal to that second advent of Christ which both he and they believed to be close at hand. He tries to rouse them to a more steadfast and earnest struggle against all the fatal but alluring forms of vice which haunt the darkness, by reminding them that the night of the world is nearly over, that the dawn of that great day is near on which all the works of darkness shall be reproved. And, because "the night is far spent, and the day is at hand," he urges them to put off the garments of night, to renounce all its dark deeds, and to array themselves in the armour of light, to take a valiant part in the long conflict in which evil is to be overcome of good.

This, I take it, is what these two passages meant for those to whom they were originally addressed ; and I have brought them together because even now, if *we* should ask the question, "Watchman, what of the night? Is it well-nigh gone?" we can only answer it truly as we adopt and blend the answers both of the Apostle and of the Prophet. If we can say, "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand," we must also say, "The morning cometh, but the night cometh also."

I am by no means the first, however, who has brought these two passages together, and woven them into one. That great musician, that great artist and poet who worked in tones instead of in words or colours, Mendel-

ssohn, has given admirable expression to them both in his *Hymn of Praise*. Many of you must remember the keen and pathetic appeal of the ascending strain in which the tenor soloist demands, "Watchman, will the night soon pass?" The demand is repeated thrice, in the same sequence of notes, though, on each repetition, it is raised a whole tone in the scale, to denote the growing urgency of the speaker. And you will also remember, after the Voice has twice sung in reply, "The Watchman only said, Though the morning will come, the night will come also," with what a loud glad outburst of praise the full chorus breaks in with the final reply, "The night is departing, the day is approaching; therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us gird on the armour of light." That has long seemed to me one of the finest and most dramatic movements in the whole realm of music. And, moreover, it has this special value for us, that it is an admirable commentary on my text, partly because it blends both the Prophetic and the Apostolic answers into one, and partly because it indicates where the true emphasis falls, and which is really the final answer of the two.

To-day is both Christmas Sunday and the last Sunday of the year.¹ As the year closes, it is natural that we should ask, "Watchman, what of the night? Is it well-nigh gone, and is the day at hand?" And, but

¹ December 26, 1886.

for the fact which Christmas commemorates, we should have no reply to that question save one: "Though the morning cometh, the night cometh also." It is only the advent of Christ, and the prophecy latent in that Advent, which enable us to add, and to add in the full assurance of faith: "The night is far spent, and the day, the day which has no night, is at hand."

I. That you may see that both these answers to the question which the World and the Church have so long been asking are true, and in what sense they are true, let us consider how far St. Paul's answer to it has been fulfilled; whether the day which he foresaw did not really come, but also whether this day was not followed by a night and the promise of its dawn overcast. When *he* stood on his watch-tower and surveyed the horizon, he had much reason to believe that the night of heathenism was far spent; that the day of the Lord, the day on which Christ would take to Himself his great power and rule in all the earth, was close at hand. Paul himself had carried the light which is the life of men to nearly all the great centres of human thought and activity—to Antioch, to Athens and Corinth, to Ephesus and Colossæ, Philippi and Thessalonica, and indeed to most of the great cities round the Mediterranean Sea; while other disciples had carried it to Rome, to Egypt, and throughout the crowded East. And everywhere the light was welcomed. It was rapidly

spreading everywhere. How, then, could he doubt that the darkness was passing away, that the dawn, already kindling on the high places of the earth, would sweep down from the mountains into the valleys, regenerating the whole world, and making it everywhere bring forth the fruits of light in all goodness and righteousness and truth?

But as we look back on the period to which he looked forward with such confident hope, we can see that the end was not yet, although it seemed so near; that, though a morning came, a night came also. A new day did dawn on the world; but it was not that great day of the Lord on which all things are to be made new. Light did shine into the darkness; but the darkness was not wholly and for ever dispersed. The kingdom of Christ was set up on the earth; but it did not cover the earth. Knowledge grew from more to more; but ignorance and superstition and vice were not extirpated. Life was quickened in the very heart of death; but death was not abolished. Many who had been lost were found, many who had been bound were set free; but *the race* was not saved and enfranchised into the love and service of righteousness. The Apostolic day, or age, was hardly over before the night came rushing back; and in a few centuries the dogmas and superstitions, the vices and crimes, of heathenism were to be found in the very Church itself, where, alas, too many of

them still linger. If the Apostle's forecast was in some sense true, and *a* day, though not *the* day, of Christ was at hand, so too was the Prophet's, "Though the morning cometh, the night cometh also ;" and for long centuries the very Light that was in the world was turned to darkness, or so blended with darkness that the old heathen selfishness, and sensuality, and tyranny, eclipsed the meekness, the purity, the charity, of Christ Jesus.

Yet even in "the dark ages" there was a remnant who had light in their dwellings, and did not altogether lose hope. And when the day of the Reformation dawned on Europe, Luther and his compeers had little doubt that the true day of the Lord had come at last, that a light had arisen which would speedily renew the face of the earth. And a day *had* come, but not the great day of Christ. The end was not even yet. Over its larger spaces, even Europe still lies in darkness, the darkness of superstition, or sensuality, or indifference ; while in Africa, Asia with its teeming millions, and South America, we can discern only distant and twinkling points of light which are all but lost in the surrounding darkness.

So that when we in our turn ask, "Watchman, what of the night ? Is it almost gone ? Will it soon pass ?" we too can often hear none but the old reply, "If a morning is coming, so also is a night." We try to hope,

but the verdict of History is against us. Many before us have hoped that the day of Christ, the golden age of righteousness and peace, was at hand, and their hope made them ashamed. How can we look for a happiness denied to them? Analogy is against us. How long it took to make the world! how slowly was it built up, inch by inch, before it was ready for the foot of man! And how intolerably slow is man's growth and development! Despite all our boasts of modern progress, was Goethe or Carlyle, is any living philosopher or poet, a much wiser man than Plato? Would Professor Huxley place himself above Aristotle? Is Edison more inventive than Archimedes? Might you not reasonably hesitate before pronouncing the Archbishop of Canterbury a better man than Socrates, or Mr. Spurgeon than Epictetus? And do you not gravely doubt whether even the holiest saint of modern times is to be compared with the simple and unlearned men and women who, nineteen centuries ago, ate their food with glad simplicity of heart and, in life and in death, were forever praising the God who had revealed Himself to them in the face of Jesus the Christ?

Reason and experience are against us. Think what the world is like,—how nation makes war on nation, and class on class, how common and unblushing vice is even among those who should be best fortified against it by education and position, how much of our virtue is

but a prudent and calculating selfishness ! Think how hard we ourselves know it to be to wean even one heart from selfishness and self-indulgence, and to fix it in the love and pursuit of whatsoever is true and fair, good and kind ; how slowly we advance in godliness even when we have the grace of God to help us and are working together with Him ! Remember that, before the Regeneration can come, before the day and kingdom of Christ can be established in all the world, *every* heart has to be redeemed from evil and imperfection, has to be made just, pure, charitable, and compassionate, that *all* classes and all races have to be taught to live together in love and amity. And then tell me whether you can honestly say, "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand ;" whether you must not rather say, "The dawn may be coming, but as surely as the day comes, the night will come also ; many days, and many nights, must still pass, many alternations of light and darkness must sweep across the face of the earth, before the great day of the Lord can arise and shine upon us."

2. If that be your conclusion—and I have shewn you how much support it has in history, in analogy, and in the reasoning which is based on experience—I have good tidings for you ; or, rather, the Season itself has "glad tidings of great joy" for us all. For, though I cannot deny that many mornings must be followed by many nights before the day of universal righteousness

and peace will break on the world, and the horologe of Time will ring in

the happy age,
When truth and love shall dwell below
Among the works and ways of men,

yet the very meaning and message of Advent is, that all these mornings and evenings are gradually leading in the day of the Lord ; that He is preparing for the coming of his kingdom in the darkness as well as in the light, by every night through which we pass as well as every day, by every disappointment and every postponement of hope as well as by every fulfilment. "The night *is* departing," the darkness abating ; "the day *is* approaching," the light spreading and growing. He who came in great humility will come again in glory and in power. Many forms of wrong, cruelty, and vice are impossible now which were possible, and even common, before the Son of God and Son of Man dwelt among us ; nay, even before the Reformation carried through Europe a light by which such deeds of darkness were reprov'd. The individual man may stand little higher, whether in wisdom or in goodness, than of old ; but the number of men capable of high thoughts, noble aims, and lives devoted to the service of truth and righteousness, is incomparably larger. The world took long to make, and may take still longer to re-make ; but its re-creation in the image of God is just

as certain as its creation. The darkness of ignorance and superstition may still lie heavily over the larger spaces of the world ; but the points of light are rapidly increasing. The dawn is visibly trembling up the sky ; and the great day, still so far off to *us*, is nigh at hand, is as though it were already come, to the Inhabitant of Eternity, who faints not neither is weary, whose word cannot be broken, whose gifts and promises can never be recalled.

Fear not, then, though there be much within you to quicken fear, and so much around you to confirm that fear. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. He who came to seek the lost will not desist from the search "until he find them." He who came to save the world *will* save it. He who has taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," will see to it that his kingdom does come, that his will shall be so done on earth as to change and lift earth into heaven. He who took on Him the nature of man will redeem that nature from every trace of its bondage to evil. He who made the whole world better by dwelling in it for a few years, will make it perfect by dwelling in it for ever. He who died for all will win and rule over all, drawing all men unto Himself by the cords of a love stronger than death. As *we* count time, the end is not yet ; but as *God* counts time, the end is not far off.

If, then, in the light of this great hope, of this great *fact*, of which the Advent of Christ is our guarantee, we once more raise and reply to the question, "Watchman, what of the night? Is it well-nigh gone? Will it soon pass?" though our first answer must be, "Many mornings are coming, to be followed by many nights;" yet, remembering that God is in the darkness as well as in the light, and that in Him there is no darkness at all, our final reply must be, "Every morning, and every night, brings the great day nearer; and hence the night *is* departing, the day *is* at hand."

XXV.

THE BENEDICTION.

A HOMILY FOR THE NEW YEAR.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”—2 THESSALONIANS iii. 18.

CAN we begin the year with better words, or words of better omen, than these? As the year opens we salute each other with good wishes. Can we frame a better wish than this for each other? In the young every new year unseals a new fountain of hope and happy expectation; and even in the oldest of us, and most wayworn, there is some faint stirring of hope: if we can do no more, we trust that somehow, in some sense, this may prove a happier year than the last, that it may bring us less pain, less loss, less disappointment, or a clearer view of duty, a loftier ideal, power to live more nearly as we think and pray. And, young or old, if we take our life thoughtfully and in a Christian spirit, we feel our need of a higher wisdom, a more pure and enduring energy, to guide our steps, to mould our character, to shape our

lot for us ; we lift up our eyes to Heaven, and ask a benediction on all our days, and on all our ways, a grace which will make us equal to any fortune that may come upon us, and teach us how to pluck, from seeming evil, a real and abiding good.

“ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”— Do not these words meet your sense of need, your craving for good, your hope of a benediction which will make the new year a happy new year to you all ? To St. Paul they conveyed and implied so much, they were so bright with hope, that they became his standing good wish for those whom he loved. In some form we find them at the close of nearly all the Letters he wrote ; now reading, “ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,” and now, “ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit,” and now, as in my text, “ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” And to the Church they convey and imply so much that, in all her branches, they form the benediction, or part of the benediction, with which every public service concludes.

But constant repetition may have dulled their force and clearness. They may mean little or nothing for you because you have so often heard them ; or they may have none but a technical or theological meaning because you have seldom heard them except from the pulpit. You may never have thought of them, never

have asked what the words meant originally and still mean, what the grace of Christ was and is, and in what senses that grace may be with you, and be the crown and benediction of your whole life. And, therefore, I must point out that the phrase, "the grace of Christ," would convey at least three ideas¹ to the members of the Early Church, and should convey the same ideas to us; and that if the grace of Christ is to "be with you," or to be "with your spirit," you must in all these senses reproduce it and make it your own.

1. The first thought which this phrase would suggest to St. Paul's readers, especially to his Grecian readers—and most of his converts were Greeks—would be *the gracefulness*, the charm, of Christ. They would understand the Apostle to refer to that exquisite sensibility to beauty, the beauty of Nature and of Man, by which Christ was distinguished, that love of all that is fair and pure and good which gave^a a beauty, a winning charm, an attractiveness, to his person, his character, his manner and bearing, and to his words, which no heart not wholly dead to beauty and goodness was able to resist. Both the Puritan conception and the Monastic, or ascetic, conception of Christ have gone far to hide this thought from us—so far that I have heard grave and reverend men argue from such texts as "His face was more marred than that of any man" that they do greatly err

¹ See Cremer's Lexicon, Art. *Χάρις*.

who attribute any comeliness to the Man of Sorrows. And most of you, I suppose, have heard all beauty denounced as a snare, and have been warned to suspect whatever charms the senses or wins the heart. And yet, the moment we reflect upon it, this conception of Christ, as without form or comeliness, is wholly incredible. If the story of the miraculous conception be not a mere myth, what could the Child of a pure Virgin and of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of all goodness and beauty, be but the most pure, beautiful, and attractive of men? Nay, even if it be a mere myth, who can believe that the one Perfect Man was destitute of any outward and visible sign of his inward perfection? A lovely spirit does, indeed, transfigure even the plainest features and lend them a charm beyond that of a simply formal beauty; but a lovely spirit in a lovely form is a still more potent force. And hence the great painters who have invested the face and figure of our Lord with all the perfections of manly beauty, and who have added a pathetic charm to that beauty by depicting the perfect face as worn and wasted with thought, with compassion, with all the toil and burden of his great work of love, have reason on their side, and give us, we may be sure, a far truer conception of Him than either the Puritan or the Monk.

For the whole story of his life shews both that He was exquisitely sensitive to beauty in every form, and

that He had the still rarer power of reproducing that beauty in his words and ways. The whole world of Nature lives again in his discourses and parables, to prove how keen He was to note the loveliness of the world around Him ; while these same parables and discourses are so perfect, both in substance and in expression, as to prove that He could reproduce this beauty in still more exquisite and enduring forms. And what a keen eye for beauty of character, for a latent unsuspected goodness, must He have possessed who saw in doubting Nathanael an Israelite indeed, in fickle and impetuous Simon a steadfast Rock, in the gentle loving John a son of thunder, in timid and halting Nicodemus, and even in the wanton of Samaria, fitting recipients for the deepest truths of his kingdom, in Mary's waste of ointment an insight which transcended that of the very Apostles, and in the self-humiliation of the woman who was a sinner a love capable of transforming her into a saint ! He who spoke the most beautiful words that have fallen from human lips ; He who clothed perfect thoughts in forms so perfect that the noblest spirits of every subsequent age have held them to be "sweeter than honey" and more precious than "much fine gold," and yet in forms so simple that the common people have always heard them gladly ; He who was at home with all classes, learned and ignorant, rich and poor, powerful or enslaved, who saw good even in the worst, and found

something to love, to pity, to admire even in the forlornest outcast; He to whom little children ran for a caress, round whom wronged women and outcast men gathered as a friend,—was there no beauty, no charm, in Him? was there not rather a charm which no open and susceptible heart could withstand?

This beauty, this charm, this gracefulness, is to be with us, is to be ours, if “the grace of Christ” is to be with us. That is to say, the wish, the benediction, of my text summons us to cultivate the love of all that is fair, all that is good—all that is fair in nature, all that is good in men; and to reproduce it, so far as we may, in our words, in our manner, in our lives. We are *not* to suspect beauty, but to love and admire, to delight ourselves in it. We *are*, not only to admire goodness, and especially graceful forms of goodness, but to imitate and appropriate them. We are not to be content with being sourly or austere good, but to aim at being winningly and attractively good.

The beautiful mind, the beautiful manner, of Christ, the charm of his character, his speech, his dealings and intercourse with his fellows, be with you all:—*this* is what our good wish for the new year means. And because it is the grace, or gracefulness, *of Christ* which is invoked on you, you run no risk—as Stopford Brooke has pointed out—should the wish be fulfilled, from two dangers to which the mere lover of beauty is exposed,

and into which the æsthetes of to-day seem only too apt to fall. For the devotee of beauty lies open to the danger both of shrinking from and detesting that which is ugly, or vulgar, or common-place, and of putting beauty before justice and charity and truth, *i.e.*, of neglecting the moral virtues when they would impede, or when he thinks they would impede, his enjoyment of that which is lovely and attractive. For beautiful as He was, and much as He loved beauty, the Lord Jesus did not shrink from the vulgar and the rude, but, by his love and courtesy, raised them above themselves. He did not turn away from that which was repulsive, but touched the leper, laid his healing hand on the sightless eyeballs of the blind, hushed the wild fury of the possessed, sought and found his chief friends among unlettered peasants and fishermen, shewed Himself the Friend of publicans and sinners. As there is no figure so graceful, gentle, and attractive as his in the whole story of man, so also there is none which administers a severer rebuke to the effeminate self-indulgence of those who, in their quest of beauty, turn away from the hard and sorrowful realities of life, and cherish a dainty scorn for all who do not share their self-pleasing, self-stultifying, dream.

Nor did our Lord Jesus Christ cultivate gracefulness at the expense of truth or justice. The ethical was more to Him than the beautiful. Courteous as He was,

winning in manner, meek and gentle in spirit and in speech, He hated evil in every form, and, above all, the evil which deemed itself good and put on airs of piety. He could rebuke, in words that still burn with indignation, the rich who robbed the poor, the strong who oppressed the feeble, the Levites who turned the Temple into a den of thieves, and the House for all nations into a private estate, the Pharisees who hid their greed, their unmercifulness, their immorality, under a veil of broad phylacteries and long prayers uttered at the corners of the streets, and those blind leaders of the blind who made void the commandments of God with their fond traditions.

The grace of Christ, then, be with you all—the grace which, while it lends a daily beauty to the daily life, does not shrink from contact with the harsh and ugly facts of life, but seeks to ameliorate them ; the grace which, so far from pursuing beauty at the cost of morality, finds the purest and highest loveliness in duty, in justice, in usefulness, in a faithful and earnest response to all ethical claims.

2. But graceful manners soon break down under the strain of change, familiarity, and time, unless they spring from and express a gracious heart. And hence I must remind you of the second meaning latent in my text. For if “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” would suggest gracefulness to a Greek, to a Jew it would suggest

graciousness, a willing, friendly, genial spirit ; not righteousness simply, but a genial righteousness ; not beneficence simply, but a friendly beneficence.

There are men who are weighted all their lives by an unwilling, a reluctant, an unsympathetic temperament. They do not easily consent to what is proposed to them ; their first impulse is to say No rather than Yes. Not courtesy alone is difficult to them, but thoughtfulness for others, consideration for their wishes, a lenient judgment of their faults, a kindly interest in that which interests *them*. Their instinct is to differ rather than to concur, to wrangle rather than to assent, to criticize and condemn rather than to work with their neighbours and yield to their influence. And hence, strive as they will—and few but themselves know how hard and bitter the strife sometimes is—they lack the friendly tone, the genial manner, which commands confidence and love, and even when they do do good are apt to do it awkwardly and in a way which hurts or offends even those whom they help. They do not give *themselves* with their gifts.

But you find no trace of this stiff, reluctant, self-contained temper in Jesus Christ. Little though He had to give as the world counts gifts, the world has never seen a benefactor to be compared with Him. Not only did He give Himself for us all, but He gave *Himself* with all his gifts, gave all He had, or all they could take, to every man or woman who approached Him. There was no

offence which He was not ready to forgive, even to the sin of Iscariot, would Judas but have sought forgiveness. There was nothing He could do which He was not prepared to do for any who asked his help. So gracious was He, so stedfastly did his will stand at the yielding or giving point, that virtue went out of Him without any conscious exercise of will, whenever the hand of faith or need was laid upon Him. And how interested He was in all who spake with Him, however ignorant or faulty they might be ! how deeply He looked into their hearts ; how He drew them on, and drew them out, till they had told Him their inmost secret, till they had relieved their bosoms of the perilous stuff hidden there : and then how wisely and delicately He adapted his words and gifts to their needs ; as when, for example, He talked with the woman of Samaria by the Well ! How ready He was to love and admire them, or any trace of good in them, till they rose "to match the promise in his eyes ;" as, for instance, in the faith of the Syrophenician woman ! How much good *He* saw in them which the world could not see, and of which they themselves had lost sight ; as, for example, in Zaccheus, that true son of Abraham whom the Pharisees mistook for a child of the devil, and in the Woman who bathed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head ! How quick He was to detect any moment of weakness in those who had a little faith in Him but held it with a feeble grasp, and how

prompt to strengthen them against any sudden pressure of unbelief ; as, for example, when He said to the faltering Ruler of the synagogue, " Only believe ; all things are possible to him that believeth " !

But time would fail me—I should have to go through the whole story of his life—even to allude to the innumerable proofs of his graciousness, of his willing and friendly heart ; the graciousness which enabled Him to give so much, though of outward good He had so little to give, and which made his every gift a charm, an elevating and abiding power, to those who received it, or who listened to the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And yet, with all this graciousness, there was no softness, no weakness, no insincerity, such as we often find associated with a kindly temperament : there was nothing inconsiderate, or indiscriminate, in his boundless charity ; no yielding at a single point at which it would have been wrong to yield ; no want of faithfulness, or even of severity where severity was needed. He was as sincere as He was sympathetic, rare as that combination is. He who said to Simon, " Thou art the Rock," could also say to him, " Get thee behind me, Satan." He who said to a sinful woman, " Neither do I condemn thee," said also, " From henceforth sin no more." And He who cured a sinful man of the paralysis induced by vice, also warned him, " Sin no more, lest a worse thing "—worse even than that living death of eight and thirty years !—" come upon thee."

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3. Now when the benediction is pronounced, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," and you understand it to mean, "May you partake both the gracefulness, and the graciousness, of Jesus Christ," some of you may be tempted to say : "That is past praying for. By nature and temperament we are hard, cross-grained, unsympathetic, disposed to differ rather than to agree, to contend for our own rights rather than to yield to the claims or cravings of others. How, then, can we be friendly, courteous, suave, in heart and bearing?"

And the true answer to that question does not lie in assuming that those who speak thus of themselves do not know themselves, and are not so bad as they make themselves out ; but in pointing out to them how, and with what large measure of success, other men have struggled with a temperament as difficult as their own, and even more difficult ; how in the whole course and set of Providence, in all the rebuffs and rebukes which discourtesy and ungraciousness inevitably provoke, God is meeting them with a discipline adapted to their faults and intended to wean them from their faults ; and, above all, in shewing them what a strange and wonderful help there is for them in the grace of Christ,

For, finally, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" means *the favour* of Christ ; and his favour, not simply as a passive goodwill, or as the pleasure He takes in every phase of our conflict with evil and our successful

pursuit of that which is good, but as *an active redeeming and renewing energy*. It means the grace as of a true and great King of men, who forgives freely, bestows royally, and whose bounty, since it is prompted by a larger nature than theirs, is always in excess of the merit of his servants and friends. In the New Testament, as every student of the New Testament must know, the grace of Christ is constantly used in this high sense, used far more commonly in this sense than in any other. Oftenest of all it is employed to denote a loving and divine energy, or quality, which not only forgives, but also cleanses us from, our iniquity; which not only pardons, but redeems us from, our faults and sins: an energy which attends us through our whole career to guard us against temptation or make us strong enough to resist temptation; as able to change, elevate, and purify our whole character and disposition, and to recreate us in its own likeness.

And who dare say that, with this giving and forgiving energy, this redeeming and renewing grace, ever at work upon him, he cannot become pure, friendly, and gracious in heart, and, therefore, simple, courteous, and even graceful in manner and in speech? Who dare despair of himself, or give up self-culture as hopeless, if the strong Son of God is ever waiting to come to his help, ever seeking to bestow his gracefulness, his graciousness, to exert his forgiving and redeeming power upon us, to re-

cast our nature, our character, our temperament, on the larger fairer lines of his own ?

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all ;” the grace which redeems, renews, recreates the inward man of the heart, and so clothes even the outward man of behaviour with a new and friendlier charm. Amen.

XXVI.

THE SELF-SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

A SACRAMENTAL HOMILY.

“Thinkest thou that I cannot ask my Father, and he shall instantly send me more than twelve legions of angels?”—MATTHEW xxvi. 53.

IN the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we commemorate the death of the Son of Man. That death was a sacrifice. The sacrifice was voluntary. It is, indeed, of the essence of all sacrifice that the human will which, by an abuse of its freedom, has wandered from the Divine Will, should freely return and close with that Will. Sacrifice is for atonement : and how should the will of man be made one with the will of God save as it confesses the sin of disobedience to that Will, and pledges itself to obey it ?

But if all true sacrifice be self-sacrifice, the sacrifice of selfwill to the will of God, because that Will is seen to be better than ours, then we may say both that the life of Christ was a perpetual sacrifice, and that this sacrifice

culminated in his death. For, throughout his life, He pleased not Himself, but God, doing not his own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him ; while, in his death, He gave the last consummate proof of a will not to be shaken from its rest in God by any terror, by any pang. The sin of the world consisted in its violation of the great law of all spiritual life—obedience to the highest, purest, kindest Will we know : and hence the sin of the world could only be taken away by a sacrifice in which that Will was freely obeyed at the cost of all that men hold dear ; a Sacrifice moreover which should ultimately bend the will of the world to an obedience as free and as perfect as its own.

I. But if all true sacrifice be self-sacrifice, if its virtue consists in the sacrifice of that will in us which moves us to depart from the will of God, we need not be surprised to find so much stress laid on the perfect freedom, the perfect voluntariness, of the sacrifice of Christ. Had it not been voluntary, it would have been no true sacrifice : for what virtue is there is an *in*voluntary, a compelled, obedience ? It is only a willing obedience which can atone for disobedience. Only a willing obedience, moreover, could have so touched us as to reproduce itself in us, and set our wills in tune with Heaven. The First-born among many brethren must be seen to do his Father's will freely, cheerfully, gladly, if the younger members of the family are to catch from his example a

noble infection of obedience. Let him obey grudgingly, reluctantly, on compulsion and not from love, and as there will be no virtue in his own obedience, so also there will be no healthy and noble contagion in his example ; it will tell on the household for evil, and not for good.

Few words should be more welcome to us, therefore, than the words in which He who is not ashamed to call us brethren affirmed the entire freedom of his obedience unto death. There is, indeed, a strange power, a wonderful suggestiveness, in such words as these: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. *No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*" Calm and simple as the words are, what a tone of authority breathes through them ! how they set us on asking, "Who then is He who thus quietly assumes to be lord over his own life, lord over even death itself?" And when this same thought clothes itself in the splendid image of my text, we are still more deeply impressed by it. For a Roman legion, with its contingent of cavalry, consisted of some six or seven thousand men. And with twelve legions of *men* even, *i.e.*, with some seventy or eighty thousand disciplined soldiers, where might not Jesus have gone, what might He not have achieved ? What power was there in Jerusalem, or in Judea, that could have resisted Him

even for a moment? While with twelve legions of *angels*, what was there in Rome itself that could have inflicted a momentary check upon Him? Had the mere conquest, or the mere possession, of the world have been among his aims, He did not need that the Prince of this world should bestow its kingdoms upon Him. He could have won them for Himself. He had but to lift up his voice, and legions of the celestial warriors, who "excel in strength," would have hearkened to his commandment and delighted to do his word.

2. When we hear the Son of Man utter such words as these, and utter them in the very moment in which He was betrayed into the hands of men, and stood, or appeared to stand, a helpless victim, in their power, whatever we may think of his claim, we can hardly doubt that He does claim a more than mortal stature. Such words would be intolerable on any lips but his. Were any other man, however lofty his stature, however splendid his gifts, to claim this lordship over life, and death, and the very angels of God, even though it were a Shakespeare, a Cæsar, or a Socrates, we should conclude that the terrors of death had turned his brain, and that he was no longer responsible for the words which fell from his lips. There is a quiet consciousness of power in them, and of a divine authority over the forces of Nature and of that which is above Nature, which sounds sane enough on *his* lips however, and which we do not feel to

be out of keeping with the character of the Speaker ; while yet, if we accept them as the utterance of a sane mind, and as consistent with all we know of the Speaker, absolutely no claim has ever been made by Christ, or for Him, which we can logically resist.

3. But if there be this singular consciousness of Divine power and authority in these words, all the more singular because it is so calm and restrained, we may also find in them an equally remarkable, and a pathetic, consciousness of human brotherhood. If Christ here claims a power which He does not deign to use, He shews a power, the power of love, which touches us far more deeply. Even when He gives play to his imagination for an instant, and conceives of Himself as summoning the heavenly host to his aid, though He does not mean to summon them, it is not of Himself alone that He thinks. So close and dear are his disciples to his heart, so truly has He become one with them, or made them one with Him, that they are present, and occupy an equal place with Himself, in the momentary fancy that passes through his mind. There are but eleven of them now that the traitor has gone out from them, because he was not of them. With Christ Himself there are but twelve. And as—to shew them that his sacrifice is purely voluntary—He tells them that He could instantly call the heavenly host to his aid, were that his will, and so save Himself from

those who sought his life,—even in that passing conception of an event which is not to be, He cannot dissociate Himself from them. If He were to call the angelic legions, He must call "*twelve* legions of angels," *one for each of them* as well as one for Himself. He cannot so much as conceive of Himself as seeking a security from which they will be shut out. They must have their share in every blessing which comes to Him, even though it be an imaginary one. He will not suffer their very sins and failures to detach them from Him. They had just slept through his vigil and agony in the Garden, although He had besought and commanded them to watch with Him. Nevertheless they are his ; and if the angels should come, they must come for them as well as for Him. They are about, as He had forewarned them, to forsake Him and flee every man to his own. Nevertheless, He cannot forsake them even in thought : to think for Himself is, by a divine necessity, to think also for them.

Are *we* in his mind, too, and always in his mind, because we are in his heart ? Let us not doubt it ; for has He not promised to be with us always and to the end of the world ? And if we *are* always in his mind and heart, so one with Him that for Him to think of Himself is to think of us, and to care for Himself is to care for us ; if even our failures in loyalty and service cannot alienate Him from us, why should we fret and be

careful whether for the life that now is or for that which is to come ?

4. Once more : we can hardly ponder these words without being reminded that the Cross is more potent than the sword, and love than legions of angels. *Had* Christ called the heavenly hosts to his banner, He would have conquered the world ; but, in conquering, He might have lost the world : whereas, by being obedient unto death, He has both saved and gained the world. He took the better way. His weakness has touched and overcome those whom mere force would have crushed or repelled. By his cross He has “drawn” those whom his sword could have but compelled or slain. The legions might have made Him Master of the world ; they could hardly have made Him its Saviour and Friend. That pathetic Figure hanging, for us men, on the accursed tree, is far more potent over the wills of men than could have been that of a splendid Warrior, riding forth to smite down his foes.

5. Nor, in weighing the force and significance of these words, must we omit to note that though, as I have said, they would have been unbecoming on any lips but his, since they imply a more than mortal power, it was nevertheless part of his mission to put them into *our* lips, and to make them appropriate on our lips by making us partakers of his Divine nature and glory. In so far as we are one with Him, *we* may feel, we

ought to feel, that the very angels will come at our call ; nay, that, without being called, they do minister unto every heir of salvation, all the forces of Heaven and earth working together for our good. It is not presumption, but faith in Him and in the Father whom He came to reveal, which bids us be sure that in every critical moment of our lives, and above all in every hour and power of darkness, if we are tempted and assailed by forces with which we are unable to cope in our own strength, we are also sustained by the still mightier forces which do his pleasure ; and that nothing can really harm us so long as we are followers of that which is good.

As yet, indeed, we may not have full, and conscious, control of these Divine forces ; we cannot hope, we can hardly wish, to have it until we are wiser and walk before God with a more perfect heart. *Christ* could be trusted with it because, his will being immovably one with the will of the Father, it was impossible for Him to abuse it, impossible that He should turn it, or seek to turn it, to any selfish or unworthy end. But could *we* be trusted with it ? Could we trust ourselves with it ? If all power in heaven and in earth were offered us, should we not shrink from it in the very proportion in which we know ourselves, and know therefore the amazing difficulty of using even what power we have aright ?

Before we can have the full and conscious power of

Christ, before we can wish to have it, we must get the perfect will of Christ ; our wills, like his, must become one with that of our Father in heaven. God's ways must become our ways, his thoughts our thoughts. We must be animated, we must be dominated, by the love which moved our Saviour to offer Himself up for us all that He might bring us back unto God.

6. And one means, and a chief means, of inducing this divine temper of the soul is that thoughtful and tender contemplation of the Sacrifice of Christ to which we are invited so often as we come to the table of the Lord. That Sacrifice takes its due and proper effect upon us only as it reproduces itself more and more fully within us. The Sacrament which symbolizes and sets it forth *is* a sacrament to us only as it pledges us to an obedience like his, an obedience unto death, only as it leads us to a more sincere and stedfast adoption of the will of God. In this Sacrament *we* do not profess to repeat the Sacrifice which was offered once for all. We do not attempt, whether by our prayers or by priestly incantations, to change the bread and wine into the very body and blood of Christ : for we do not believe that by any merely physical process or transformation our spirits can be made pure and good.

And yet, do we not often come to this Sacrament as if the mere observance of it would do us good, apart from any exercise of intelligence and will? Rejecting

all theories of Sacramental grace and Sacerdotal authority, do we not in some measure act as if we held them to be true? And, on the other hand, do we not sometimes absent ourselves from this holy Ordinance because we shrink from that effort of will, thought, and devotion, which can alone give it value ; forgetting that without some such effort, constantly repeated, no man can work out his own salvation or rise into that free obedience to the large pure will of God which it is the chief end of religion to secure?

7. Even if we come hoping so to meditate on the Sacrifice of Christ as that it may raise us into a more obedient and devotional mood, are we not apt, in our meditations and prayers, to drift into a vague stream of thought and desire which fails to leave any definite trace on our souls, or to carry an added fruitfulness into our lives? Are we not apt to slip into indefinite lines of thought which what we call our "doctrines" have made familiar to us, and to ask ourselves whether we believe this or that, and so to carry away with us nothing more than a confirmed attachment to articles of belief which have but a slender relation to our daily conduct, and outside of which there lies a whole world of truth which we have never explored? Do we not at least know both those to whom the ordinances of public worship, so helpful when rightly observed, bring little but this lukewarm stream of vague emotion, which can

never brace them to clear thought or strenuous activity ; and those who, as they observe these ordinances, are for ever fingering their "doctrines," going the round of their definite but narrow creed, to the neglect of practice, till they resemble the unskilled musician who is for ever screwing up this string or that, but is never at leisure to play you a tune ?

8. Clearly, then, if this ordinance of The Supper is to do us any real and lasting good, it must so bring the obedience, the self-sacrifice, of Christ before us as to raise the level of our obedience, and to induce in us a more loving and self-denying temper of the soul. But let us remember that, even if we set this true aim clearly before us, there is still a danger of our being too vague and unpractical in our endeavour to reach it. We may still wait for some mystical, or half-mystical, touch upon our spirits, which may or may not come ; or still lose ourselves in a meditation so general and diffuse as that it will have no immediate and elevating effect on conduct and life. There is no moment in which we should be more resolutely practical than when we commemorate the dying of the Lord Jesus. For what is the great and sacred reality which this Sacrament sets before us ? It is an obedience to the will of God stronger than death. And what should be the effect of our contemplation of this sacred reality but to lead us to similar acts of obedience, to help and induce us to prefer the will of

God to our own wills in the daily conduct of our life, even though to accept and do that Will should cost us much that we hold dear?

9. "Let a man examine himself," says St. Paul, "and so let him eat of this bread and drink of this cup," lest God should both examine and chastise him. And if we are to examine ourselves, ought we not to examine ourselves in the light of the great informing idea of this Sacrament, *viz.*, an obedience rising into self-sacrifice? And if we examine ourselves in the light of that idea, must we not put ourselves through some such catechism as this?

Am I reaching forth to an obedience like that of Christ, an obedience to which the will of God is dearer than life itself, or all that life offers? In the several provinces and details of my life, am I animated by a love which refuses no sacrifice of self? In so far, for instance, as I am a citizen and therefore a politician, do I seek the good of others as well as my own good, the welfare of the country at large rather than my own advantage or the advantage of my own class? Do I take my full share of public work and public burdens, or do I push off such work and burdens on my neighbours if I get a chance, and expect them to do what I do not care to do myself? If not, how am I shewing the love and self-sacrifice of Him who loved all men, and gave Himself up both to and for them all? In the

conduct of my business, do I seek to promote my neighbours' interests as well as my own, the interests of my workpeople and my customers or the interests of those whom I serve, and scorn to take advantage of any man's poverty, or ignorance, or absence, or helplessness? If not, how am *I* fulfilling the law of Christ? In the Home—that smaller church,—and in the Church—that larger home,—am I trying to teach as well as to learn, to do good as well as to get good, to shew kindness as well as to receive kindness, to serve as well as to be served? If not, how dwelleth the love of Christ in me? how am I breathing the spirit of Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for the many?

It is as we examine ourselves thus, my brethren; it is as, in the light of that divine Sacrifice, we look into our daily lives, and confess the failures and imperfections of our obedience, and ask for the love which can alone conquer our natural selfishness, and brace ourselves to serve our fellows, and bear their burdens, and help their infirmities, that the spirit of our Master will enter into our spirits, and, sitting at his table, we shall eat a veritable bread from heaven, and drink the very wine of the Kingdom.

XXVII.

CLEAVE TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD.

“Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good.”—1 THESSALONIANS v. 21.

THE sense in which this fine precept is commonly taken is not that in which it was originally intended. St. Paul was writing to men into whose dry and barren hearts a quickening spiritual influence had been poured, which called forth latent powers of life, enriching them with many fruits, and clothing the arid soil with many flowers ; but which also called into poisonous activity many seeds of evil, so that tares sprang up with the wheat and weeds among the flowers. When they came together in Church every one of them “had a psalm, or a doctrine, or a revelation, or a tongue, or an interpretation,” and was bent on exhibiting the strange power, or gift, of which he was conscious. And they were prompted to the use of these extraordinary gifts by motives as various, motives in which good and ill were as strangely blended, as the motives by which *we* are prompted to the exercise of our more common and ordinary endowments. They

were not all—perhaps no one of them was always—moved by a simple desire to edify the brethren and glorify God. They were moved at times, as we are too often moved, by emulation, by vanity, by envy, and the love of strife. There was much that was evil, as well as much that was good, in the display of their spiritual gifts, and a growing danger to the purity and the peace of the Church. Hence St. Paul, while he counselled them not to quench these motions of the Spirit, and not to despise the “prophesyings,” also commanded them to “prove all things,” *i.e.*, to try the spirits, to put their communications to the test; to hold fast to all that they felt to be good in them, but to abstain from and abhor whatever was evil.

Beyond a doubt, *this* is the original sense of St. Paul’s words. He was dealing with “the gifts of the Spirit,” with the prophetic and supra-natural energies of the infant Church; he was exhorting his friends at Thessalonica to discriminate between spirit and spirit, to follow after whatever was good in the great spiritual movement of their age, and to hold aloof from whatever was evil and injurious in it.

But, taken in its original sense, his exhortation was only for the time being. To render it universal, to make it applicable to all times, we must generalize it; we must get at the principle which informed and prompted it. And, obviously, this principle is,—That in every age,

whatever its characteristic spiritual movement and tendency may be, we are to keep an open, and yet a steadfast, mind: we are to listen to all that is said around us, if at least there be any likelihood and good sense in it, to weigh it fairly, and not to despise aught that is good in it because the good in it has an intermixture of evil, but to disentangle the one from the other, that we may hold fast that which is good and fling the evil away.

A Divine Spirit works in and through every age, and through the Church of every age, to a foreseen end of good: but this Spirit must reveal itself through human organs, must speak through human voices, or how shall it reach human minds and hearts? Yet the human voice cannot adequately utter the Divine thought; no human organ can fully reveal and express the Divine Spirit. Men, even though "filled with the Spirit," are still but men; and, while revealing the Spirit, must also reveal themselves—reveal even that which is faulty and imperfect in themselves. If He *will* use men, therefore, the Perfect Spirit must submit to imperfection; the absolute and eternal Spirit must come under the limitations of time and sense: his manifestation of Himself must be bounded and tinged by the medium through which it passes to us. And, therefore, we should *expect* to find imperfection mingling with perfection in every revelation of the Spirit, and evil blending with good

in every human exercise of spiritual power. It is *our* duty, as it was that of the Thessalonians, to detach the evil from the good, that we may cleave to that which is good, and shake from it the evil which of necessity accompanies and clings to it.

Now as we consider this conception of Christian duty, if we must admit it to be a very just and noble conception, we cannot but also confess that it is so lofty and difficult that we can hardly hope to come up to it. And never was it more difficult than in the present age. For the domain of human knowledge has grown at once so wide and so full that even men of culture and leisure cannot master more than a mere corner of it; while yet from every corner and every point of this wide domain there come voices which solicit or demand our attention; many of these voices, moreover, contradicting each other, although they all speak in the most absolute and authoritative tones. Human life, too, has grown so rapid and so complex, we are exposed to so many, to such various, and even contrary, influences, our most familiar conceptions of life and duty are in so many cases proving to be, like Isaiah's bed and blanket, too short for a man to stretch himself upon and too narrow for a man to wrap himself in, that even those who are most set on living by the law of God often feel themselves quite unable to prove *all* things, and to hold fast that which is good in them all.

We admit the nobility of the Apostle's ideal ; we feel that to keep our minds open to all spiritual influences, while yet our perception of truth is so keen and our allegiance to it so strict that we instinctively reject that in them which is not good, would be to reach the topmost round of duty, and to dwell in an enduring and unassailable blessedness. "But," we ask, "who is sufficient for these things? *We* have neither leisure nor ability to entertain all the great questions that are raised and discussed around us. Nothing is safe from the critical and questioning spirit of the age. The very rudiments of faith and duty, the very foundations of the house in which we would fain abide in tranquility and peace, are being turned up and examined,—accepted by some, rejected by others. Even the master-builders are hardly agreed about a single stone. Are we to stand roofless, or to wander in mere occasional and provisional tents, till their interminable disputes draw to an end? Are we, simple and busy men, who have no leisure and no mind for such discussions, to take up these disputes, to test all that the wise and learned both affirm and contradict, and to decide for ourselves problems on which they have reached no decision? And if not, how are we to obey St. Paul's precept, and put all things to the proof, that we may hold fast that which is good?"

That is a fair question to ask, a sensible and practical question ; and therefore I will try to answer it. I will

try to shew you how men of only fair natural capacity, and without much training or leisure, may so cultivate their judgment and so order their lives as to find themselves on the side of Truth and Goodness even in this critical and sceptical age.

And, first, let me say that a certain degree of mental and spiritual culture is open to every man whose heart is set upon it. The men who have done most even in the realm of Thought have not been those whose conditions were most happy and auspicious—Darwin, for instance, taught himself nearly all he knew, and had all his life to snatch a few hours for work from a great waste of pain and weakness ; but those who have had to encounter impediments and vexations of the most crippling kind. It is in the conflict with difficulties that the mind grows most surely and most rapidly, just as the noblest trees of the forest are those which have had to breast the storm. If you talk with any man who has attained intellectual power and distinction, nay, if you talk with any cultivated and fine-natured man, you will find that *his main regret is not that his opportunities have been so few and scanty, but that he has not made a better use of the opportunities he has had.* More and more, as we grow older, we are all constrained to confess that it is not so much our want of means and opportunities which is responsible for any lack of knowledge, or wisdom, or goodness, of which we are conscious, as it is our neglect,

or our negligent use, of the means and opportunities afforded us. "The fault *is* in us, not in our stars, if we are underlings." Socrates was wise, and Solomon was wise ; but any man who can read, and can get admission to a decent library, has an easier access to sound learning than either Solomon or Socrates enjoyed. "The slow sad hours which bring us all things ill" are also "the slow sweet hours which bring us all things good ;" and among the good things brought us by the lapse of time is this—that the means of knowledge and of mental culture are at our very door, insomuch that, in so far as the means and aids to knowledge are concerned, even the poorest of us is far better off than the choicest sages of antiquity. If you could have shut up Plato or Epictetus to a Bible and a Shakespeare merely, would *they* have complained, think you, that they had not the means of learning all that it most behoves a man to know ? and which of you may not have a library in which at least these two books shall be found ?

But what I want chiefly to point out to you is, that it is not mere crudition, mere book-learning, which gives a man culture, or makes him truly wise : it is, rather, the inward bent which leads him to take delight in just, vigorous, and beautiful thinking. And, in like manner, it is not a mere knowledge of duty, however wide or exact, which makes a man *good*, but the inward bent which makes him delight in just, vigorous, and beautiful

conduct. Many a man has been wise, and wise with the wisdom which enabled him to put every subject that engaged his thoughts to the proof, and to seize upon all that was good in it, who has read but few books, because he had but few to read. And *you* may be wise with this wisdom, even though you have not leisure to read much. Of course, if you are set on wisdom, you *will* read good books if you can; but if you can not, be very sure of this, that you can do, and do well, without them. It is not reading, but thought, and contemplation, and living in harmony with his best thoughts, which really cultivate a man and make him truly wise. A habit of observation and of meditation on the facts of Nature and of human life—a habit of reflection, I say, is worth more than many books, worth more than all.

But you may plead: "I have no leisure even for thought, and very little capacity for it." I reply: Even leisure is not indispensable to thought, nor are those who have the least to do at all conspicuous whether for the power or the justness of their thinking. What is to prevent you from reflecting on the men whom you meet in the course of your day's work, on their likenesses and differences, on the ways in which their characters are growing or hardening, on the laws by which their lives are governed, and on the issues to which they run. Above all, what is to prevent you, if you bend yourself that way, from reflecting on *yourself*, and on the strange

problems involved in your very being and life. God is with you every day, and the law of God ; and if you look, you will see how both his law and his grace enter into and shape your life, and will learn many a precious lesson for your guidance and instruction. Leisure ! Learning ! Some of the most thoughtful and wisest men I have known, men whose judgment on any large moral question, and even on any deep spiritual problem, I would rather have had than that of any learned scholar or metaphysician, have been among the busiest of men, the least educated in the common sense of that term, and, let me add, the poorest in this world's goods.

But the less leisure you have for study or reflection, and the less capacity for it, the more earnestly would I urge you to lay to heart a simple but most precious secret, to the truth and value of which I believe every thoughtful and experienced man will bear witness : *viz.*, that true practical wisdom does not consist in the extent of knowledge a man possesses, nor in his power of reproducing it, but *in the habitual preference of higher thoughts over lower thoughts, of noble and generous thoughts over poor and selfish thoughts.* I am bold to say that if any of you will make *this* the rule of your life, you will infallibly become wise, whatever your station may be, and however poor and limited your opportunities : for it is this habit of *cleaving to that which is good* which is the best result of the highest culture, and the very substance of all wisdom.

What do you yourselves mean by a wise man if not a man who thinks largely, boldly, nobly, and who is thus raised above all that is petty and sordid and mean? In ancient times a philosopher, or lover of wisdom, was one whose mind was so set on the larger and loftier ends of life that loss and gain, and all the ordinary sources of grief and pleasure, were as nothing to him; his kingdom was within him, beyond the reach of outward accidents and alarms. He was "lord of himself, though not of lands, and, having nothing, yet had all." And of all men the Christian should be a philosopher in *this* sense; *i.e.*, he should be a man who thinks largely, boldly, generously; a man whose thoughts "wander through eternity" and raise him above the changes and allurements of time; a man who sees and grasps the large and high spiritual ends of life so strongly that its outward events cannot shake him from his rest in them; a man whose kingdom is within him, not without, whose wealth lies in what he *is*, not in what he *has*; a man who is equal to all things because Christ sits at the very centre of his being, at the very source and fountain of his life.

Now if you do, or should, make it your rule to discriminate the good there is in all things and to hold fast to it, consider in how many ways it will affect and raise the whole tone of your life. As you pass through the world you often meet with men who are nothing if they

are not critical. Submit any scheme to them, and, as by instinct, they pass by all that is good in it, to pounce on any little faults they can detect in it, or even to *pick* the holes they cannot find. Set them to talk of their neighbours, and again it is not the good in them on which they fasten, but the evil—their faults, or even their foibles ; so that after a while you come away from them with a bad taste in your mouth, to find that all the world has grown darker and baser to you than it was. Do business with them, and you find them captious, suspicious, unreasonable, bent on getting their own way in trifles, always on the watch lest you should “take them in,” never so much at ease as when they are making you uneasy. Do you call these men wise, or even good ? Would you care to resemble them, to share their carping and censorious spirit ?

On the other hand, you sometimes meet with men who take large and hopeful views of their fellows and of human life ; men who put a generous construction on the conduct and the motives of their neighbours, who find much to admire in them, if also somewhat to regret ; men who habitually dwell in a high and wide region of thought in which the petty cares and vexations of life have little power : and these are the men whom you call wise and good : these are they whom you *would* like to resemble, whose spirit you would be glad to share.

You *may* be like them. Christ came to make you like

them, by giving you large themes for thought, large hopes for men, large interests in the upper world, large measures of his own large and kindly spirit. And the test to which you are daily put is this :—Do you, who profess to have taken Christ for your Teacher and Lord, habitually fasten on that which is high and large and noble in the subjects of which you think and speak, or on that which is low and gross, small and mean? Has that which is good in all things a stronger and more constant attraction for you than that which is not good? Are you learning to see a soul of goodness even in all things ill, and to love it ; or do you see first and more habitually the evil which thwarts or impedes it? Every subject of thought has a higher and a lower aspect, a broader and a narrower handle. Do you take hold of it on its broader or its narrower side? Do you regard it in its higher aspect or its lower?

One constantly encounters men who, start what topic you will, instantly plunge into its more trivial and superficial details, and are so absorbed in these that they lose sight of its larger outlines, its more generous features, its quickening and informing spirit. Are *you* of these? If you are, there is no hope of your attaining wisdom, or a goodness worthy of the name, till you change your habit of thought and your point of view. The way to grow wise, and to make men wise and good, is to form a habit, when two different aspects of a subject are before us, of

seizing on that which is the higher, the more inward and essential, and of cleaving to this. The way to grow wise and good, and to make men so, is, when two different views of a neighbour's character and motives are possible, to take that which shews him at his best. To love to dwell among great, generous, kindly thoughts is the true road to wisdom, let wits and cynics sneer as they will ; and this is a road which any man may take, however little he may have read, however scanty his leisure.

In like manner, just as wisdom lies in a love of lofty noble, and generous thoughts, so goodness lies in the love and pursuit of large, noble, and generous actions. As a practical rule for a Christian man bent on bringing his life into harmony with the pure and kindly will of God, I know none better than this : When several lines of conduct are open to him, let him take the highest, the least selfish, the most difficult to mere flesh and blood ; let him, to use St. Paul's wording of this rule, walk after the spirit, and not after the flesh. For example, I may either requite a man for the wrong he has done me by injuring and humiliating him, or I may do him a kindness of which he will never know. Which course ought I to take—the higher or the lower ? In the management of my business I may so determine a doubtful point as to get a little gain for myself, or to pass it on to my workpeople or to my customers. Which course ought I to take if I am bent on being wise and good—

the higher or the lower? I have fallen into penury when I might fairly have expected the comforts of competence; and of course I may either sink into a peevish, querulous, suspicious temper, or I may turn so brave and bright a face on misfortune as to smooth away the terrors of its frown. Or I have to endure a great sorrow, and I may either suffer it to depress me into a gloomy and repining mood which will make me a burden to myself and to all about me, or I may confront it with a constancy and patience which will rob it of its sting. Which of these two courses ought I to take—the higher or the lower? Obviously, if I would either prove myself to be, or put myself in the way of becoming, a wise and good man, I must, in all these cases and in all similar cases, take the higher path and keep it.

To see the good there is in all things, and to hold fast by it, is therefore a sufficiently practical, as it is a wholly Christian, rule of life. Let us walk by it, then, that we may become wise and good after the pattern and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. For, surely, nothing in the daily conduct of his life is more obvious and notable than the eagerness with which, while proving all things and all men, He habitually fastened on that which was good in them, and quickened it into new vigour and comeliness. May his Spirit so dwell in us that we shall follow his example, and tread in his steps.

XXVIII.

ABHOR THAT WHICH IS EVIL.

“Abstain from every form of evil.”—I THESSALONIANS v. 22.

“ABSTAIN from all *appearance* of evil,” says the Authorized Version : and more than once when we have read this Chapter together I have paused to tell you, what the Revised Version tells you now, that the true rendering of the Greek is not “Abstain from all *appearance*,” but “abstain from every *form*, every *species*, of evil.” And when once this necessary alteration is pointed out to us, it instantly commends itself to our common sense ; while the more we reflect upon it, the more it commends itself to us. “Why, of course,” we say, “taken so, the whole passage hangs together. The holy Apostle bids us prove all things, that we may know whether they are good or bad, and then, when we have proved them and found out what they are, he bids us hold fast to every thing that is good, and fling away everything that is bad.” We say : “Why, of course, neither the true man nor the true Christian must concern himself about mere

semblances and the shows of things ; *his* main concern must be about realities. He must often be content to look like a fool if he would be really wise ; like a coward, if he would be really brave ; like a sinner, if he would be really good ; like a traitor, if he would be really loyal." We say : " Why, of course ; the best men have not always been *accounted* the best, nor the wisest the wisest. Often they have been everywhere spoken against—denounced as fools because they were too wise for their time ; as liars, or as heretics who believed a lie, because they saw more truth than their neighbours, or were more devoted to it and would speak it out ; as sinners above all men, because they would live by a higher law." And, finally, we say : " Why, of course ; St. Paul was himself the very last man to square either his thoughts or his life by the shows, the semblances, of things. So far from fearing the appearance of evil, he so utterly disregarded it that he was pursued through his whole career by men who charged him with disloyalty to God, to the creed and covenant of his fathers, to the very blood that ran in his veins ; charged him with disloyalty to the Roman Empire and religion as well as to the Jewish religion and race ; nay, with disloyalty to Christ Himself, to the Church He had founded, the truths He had taught, the apostles who had ' accompanied ' with Him from the beginning."

St. Paul was a man who kept his mind open to new

and larger views of truth, and who could insist on them when to insist on them was to incur the suspicion and hatred both of Jew and of Christian, both of his brethren after the flesh and his brethren after the spirit ; as when, for example, he maintained that circumcision was nothing in the teeth of the Church as well as the Synagogue. He was a man *so* loyal to the truth that he could endure the charge which seems to drive many brave and thoughtful men out of all composure—the charge of being inconsistent with himself, and even glory that what he once accounted gain he now knew to be loss. He was a man who, so far from compromising his convictions in the desire to follow a “safe” course, took what all who were in the Church before him held to be an unprecedented and most dangerous course from the moment he entered on the practical labours of his Apostleship ; and it was by taking this dangerous course that he flung open the gates of the kingdom of God to the whole Gentile world. He was a man who could confront a difficult and unwelcome duty without flinching, and rebuke a brother Apostle to his face, publicly charging him, if need were, with “hypocrisy,” as he charged St. Peter at the famous council of Antioch. He was a man who, against the opposition of his most beloved fellow-labourers, could insist on putting the right man in the right place, as when, in his sharp contention with Barnabas, he said, “No, not Mark, but

Silas, is the right man to be our colleague," and actually separated himself from his old comrade rather than give way, though he owed Barnabas much and loved him much.

It was impossible that such a man as this, who moved through the world and the Church in a cloud of distrust, suspicion, hostility ; it was impossible that a man who, as he himself complains, was deemed the very " filth of the earth " and " the offscouring of all things," should have admonished us to avoid the mere *appearance* of evil. He himself constantly *appeared* to do evil—that which even the good men of his time denounced as evil ; and every man who faithfully follows Christ *must* risk—as who knew better than he?—the appearance and the charge of evil in order that he may avoid its reality.

So we argue, so we conclude, when we reflect on St. Paul's words, blaming ourselves that we should ever have read them in a sense so alien to the spirit of the man. And yet, though St. Paul's meaning is so obvious and so unquestionable when we come to look into it, how often have we had this Verse thrown into our teeth in its inaccurate and mistranslated form ! how often have we been silenced by it, though not convinced ! There can be but few of us who have not been choked off by it from some good or innocent course, at least when we were young and had not acquired the habit of reading and interpreting the Bible for ourselves. When, for

example, certain questions of what amusements are lawful or unlawful were in the wind, which of us has not heard the warning?—"Yes, this or that may be innocent enough in itself; but then, you see, it has a bad name, and if you were to indulge in it, it would have a bad look; and, you know, we are commanded to avoid the very appearance of evil." When certain new forms of Christian doctrine were being discussed, which of us has not had to listen to the advice?—"It may be true; I dare say it is; but I would not teach it if I were you: it is dangerous doctrine, and might easily be perverted or misconstrued." Which of us has not received some such advice as this, and found some sober, if not frowning, brow to approve and bless it with the text which St. Paul never wrote and never could have written? When questions of character and conduct were being discussed, and the sins of good men, or of men professedly good, were being held up for censure, which of us has not been warned?—"Hush, don't speak so loud! It is all very sad and very wrong, but it does harm to have these things known; it makes a scandal and brings a stain on the holy name of Religion." And then the Verse which St. Paul did not write has been quoted again; and we perhaps have held our peace, and have ourselves been condemned by the world as partakers in the sins we were not honest enough to denounce. So, once more, when men were being chosen to posts of

honour and of service, whether in the Church or out of the Church, which of us has not been driven from voting for the men we thought best and most competent by the plea that it would not *look* well ; that the man we preferred was not sound in his religious views, or that he was not of our faction, or that his social position was not sufficiently good, or that he was not acceptable to this influential person or that ; that to make a stand for him might cause division and strife, or bring our motives into suspicion, or occasion us some loss of help or favour which we could ill afford to bear ? Which of us has not been urged to yield, or at least to refrain, by the supposed authority of St. Paul as conveyed in this mis-translated Verse—St. Paul who broke with the beloved Barnabas rather than suffer the faithless or fearful Mark to be elected a minister and representative of the Church !

As yet, however, I have only spoken of the past, when we and all the world were young. I have spoken only of men who *used* to give this kind of advice, and to support it with a text the Apostle never wrote, though they honestly thought he wrote it. But I cannot add—I wish I could add—that this breed of men has quite died out, and that we never hear such advice now. We hear it far too often. There are only too many advocates of safe and respectable courses, of timid choices and cowardly compromises in which principles are tampered

with, and the claims of truth and righteousness are subordinated to the demands, or supposed demands, of expediency. There are still too many among us—and they are to be as often found inside the Church as outside of it—who are more afraid of the appearance of evil than of evil itself, and who often mistake for evil that which is good. These are they who, on the theoretical side, assume reason to be the enemy of faith, and science the enemy of religion; and who, on the practical side, love safety more than duty, deem that the end justifies the means, and take success to imply the favour and blessing of God. New and larger convictions are unwelcome to them, if they are unpopular; the principles of the New Testament must not be too closely pressed in practice: true doctrines may be dangerous doctrines, they think, and ought not to be taught: the errors and sins of the good should be hushed up to avoid scandal, strife and division are to be averted even at the cost of justice, and honesty, and honour. Their gravest concern is for reputation, for consistency, for the success of any cause in which they are engaged. They dread lest evil should somehow come of good. They doubt lest truth herself should prove to be a liar. They will not suffer things to take their rightful and natural course, but want to play providence to Providence itself. Unconscious as they are of the presumption, they nevertheless act and talk as if they suspected that Almighty God could not

take care of Himself without their help ; as if the very heavens would fall if *they* did not prop them up !

But why should I labour to describe them ? You know the type I have in view only too well ; and if you are true men, you have had to strive and contend against them and their influence. For, instead of being followers and disciples of Paul, as he was of Christ, they are his ethical opposites : instead of obeying his precept, they are openly and flagrantly disobeying it ; since what he here urges upon us is that we prove all things, all that comes to us in the form of truth, or duty, or pleasure, and then cleave to that we find to be good in it, however bad it may look, however difficult or dangerous it may be, while we fling away all that we see to be evil in it, however alluring it may be, however safe and easy it may seem. To St. Paul, the highest truth was the highest safety, and to do right in scorn of consequence the daily and ingrained habit of his life. And he would have us think as he thought, and do as he did.

Look at this much-abused precept once more, then, and mark how it bears upon our duty and conduct. When we hear St. Paul's true voice, and find him saying, "Abstain from every species of evil ; recoil from evil *in every form*," we can hardly fail to be reminded that there are many of us, or many among us, who do carefully avoid some forms of evil, but not all ; many who do not even seriously set themselves against certain

forms of evil, hardly feel indeed that they *are* evil: many of whom that old couplet is true which speaks of men who "compound for sins they are inclined to, by damning those they have no mind to." And, generally speaking, the sins which, on the one hand, they condemn, and the sins which, on the other hand, they do not practically recognize as sins, may be divided into these three classes :—

(1) They condemn and renounce common sins, sins of the flesh, for instance, the sins which everybody condemns, while they too often allow themselves in the more penetrating, inveterate, and fatal sins of the spirit—such sins, for example, as selfishness, a too great deference to the world and the world's law, ill-temper, or a melancholy, hopeless, and dejected spirit. And yet, I suppose that, on the whole, more misery is caused by ill-temper than by murder, by a stooping and melancholy spirit than by theft; and that more noble natures are ruined by selfishness and a creeping worldliness than by drunkenness even or lasciviousness.

Or (2) they condemn what they hold to be great sins, and allow themselves in what they hold to be little sins. Unbelief, heresy, impurity, with all the sins forbidden by the Decalogue, offer few temptations to them; but the trivial and sneaking sins, which often steal away a man's soul or ever he is aware—such sins as meanness, censoriousness, unforgivingness, conceit, pushing for the best

place and the biggest dish and the fullest purse—they hardly take for sins at all, and therefore do not make any serious stand against them ; although it is often these mean, petty, and only half-suspected forms of evil which work them the most harm, and do most to corrupt the world.

Or (3) it is the sins alien to their own temperament which they condemn, and the sins congenial to it which they allow. Silent and reserved people, for instance, are apt to be hard on all sins of the tongue ; sweet-natured people on all faults of temper ; thoughtful and experienced people on all the sins of youth and inexperience ; while they may be very lenient to the defects of their own qualities ; the silent, to sins of gloominess and ungeniality ; the good-tempered, to the sins, or at least the dangers, of good-fellowship and light-heartedness ; the aged and experienced, to the sins of avarice and suspicion, or of any other evil habit to which they are liable.

In these, and in many similar ways, we are all in danger of disobeying St. Paul's precept, "Avoid evil in every form." On these weak points, therefore, let us be on our guard, let us mount a special guard. For, of course, if we are wise, if we are bent on bringing our whole life under law to God, it is just at the points of danger that we shall keep a more vigilant watch. Instead of being loud in condemnation of sins we have no mind

to, we shall most severely condemn the sins to which we are inclined, and set ourselves most resolutely against them. Instead of bidding the sentinels of the soul stop the big sins, the gross sins, from which every honest conscience recoils, and which therefore they are not likely to let pass, we shall be urgent with them to warn us of the little sins which it is only too easy to overlook, and the common sins which, as they have too often found admittance already, are sure to seek admittance again, and, as familiar visitors, are only too likely to escape arrest. While, if we have learned in some good measure to keep the body under, in place of bending our main strength against the conquered sins of sense, let us watch and strive and pray against those more subtle sins by which our spirits are beset; let us seek to attain a confidence in truth which will not suffer us to suspect that any form of truth can be dangerous: a faith in right and duty which will compel us to follow them at all risks and costs; and a trust in God which will not permit us to doubt that the world will be well ruled so long as He sits on the throne without any surreptitious help of ours; a trust which will not permit us to think that we can aid either God or the world by being untrue to our convictions, or by subordinating the claims of plain honesty to the demands of that ignoble expediency in whose name so many sins have been wrought.

XXIX.

MOTIVES.

“How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father.”

“Lo, these many years do I serve thee, never transgressing any of thy commandments ; yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends ; but when this thy son came, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf.”—LUKE xv. 17, 18 ; 29, 30.

WHEN we read, and even when we speak of, this Parable, we are commonly, and naturally, so occupied with its main feature as to pass lightly over its minor details. It is the wonderful love of the father for his children which engrosses our attention—his inalienable, ineffable, all-forgiving love, whether for his penitent, or his impenitent, though not less sinful, son.

Jesus Christ came into the world, as He Himself declares, *to shew us the Father* ; to convince and persuade us that *He* is our Father whom men had so misconceived as to hold Him in perpetual dread, as to mistake the chastenings and rebukes of his love for the severities

of a burning and well-nigh inappeasable anger. And never did He reveal the Father in words more touching, or that came home to the human heart with a swifter and more direct flight, than when He spoke this Parable.

Knowing the intention, the meaning, of the Story, and craving above all things to be informed and assured of God's real attitude toward us, it is natural that the bearing of the Father should absorb our attention, and that we should pay comparatively little heed to his unworthy sons, and to the motives by which they were impelled, "If God be *our* Father," we say, "and our Father is like *that*, O fools and blind that we have been to sin against a love so pure and deep, to distrust Him, to wander from Him! Let us arise, and go to Him, and say, Father, we have sinned against Thee; but we did not know Thee; we could not believe that any one loved us so tenderly and forgivingly, or that we were worthy of such a love. Pardon us; receive us; restore us; suffer us to abide with Thee as servants, if we may no longer be sons."

But though it is very natural that we should be so preoccupied with the Father's love as to pay little attention to the sordid and selfish motives which brought the Prodigal home, and which kept his brother from leaving home, we lose much by passing them over so lightly, lose, above all, that full and complete conception of the Father's love which might carry comfort to our hearts

in some of our most common, our saddest and most depressed, moods.

For nothing is more common, even in the Church, I suppose, than that rooted distrust of the love of God which may spring in part from the theological conceptions in which we were bred, but which, if we may trust the great religious writings and poems of all races and all ages, is for the most part an instinct of our very blood, and dates perhaps from the Fall. Though Christ has shewn us the Father, and though we daily pray to our Father *in heaven*, pray *i.e.* to a God who is as much better than the best human father as the heavens are high above the earth, yet even good men, even the most sincerely religious men among us, find it well-nigh impossible to shake off that base fear of Him which breeds both torment and bondage.

Nay, even *that* is, I am afraid, a very partial and inadequate statement of the actual fact. The actual fact is, I believe, that, however broad our creed, and however large the hopes we entertain for others, we cherish a distrust of ourselves so ingrained and profound that we cannot, except in rare and fugitive moods, persuade ourselves that God really loves us with a love which can never change, never relax its hold upon us, never suffer us to fall away from Him. Our very religion is apt to be austere, pensive, melancholy. The tone of our very prayers—in which we are for ever asking for-

givenness as of One who finds it hard to forgive, and deprecating an anger which we feel that we deserve—convicts us of a fearful looking-for of judgment long after we profess to have found salvation. To most of us—perhaps to all of us in most of our moods—the Gospel itself is far from being “glad tidings of great joy;” instead of inspiring us with courage, with a large and generous hopefulness, a pure and elevating gladness, it would seem to offer us little more than a somewhat dubious chance of salvation, if our temptations should not prove to be too strong or our flesh too weak. We inspect and analyze our motives, the motives which led us to close with the invitations of the Gospel, or which retain us, if we are retained, in the service of God, till we doubt and suspect them, and cannot be sure that we entered by the straight gate and are walking in the right way. In our acts of public worship it is only too easy to strike too high a note, or at least a note in which many can join only with a hesitating and trembling heart. If, for example, we are asked to sing the hymn beginning with the verse,

My God, I love Thee, not because
I hope for heaven thereby;
Nor yet because who love Thee not
Are lost eternally :

or that other hymn, beautiful and beloved though it be, which opens thus—

Dismiss me not Thy service, Lord,
But train me for Thy will ;
For even I, in fields so broad,
Some duties may fulfil :
And I will ask for no reward
Except to serve Thee still,

those of us who "breathe thoughtful breath" often falter and hesitate in our response, and question our right to take such words upon our lips.

And there is such grave room for doubt, we so habitually fall short even of our own poor and imperfect ideals, sincerity is so precious, reverence and awe are so essential to our spiritual health, that if a Preacher set himself to encourage weak and fainting souls by shewing how little God will accept of them, what low and unworthy motives He will deign to use for our good, drawing us to Himself by the most slender and brittle cords, he cannot but fear lest, while giving courage and hope to the timid and self-distrustful, he should mislead and injure as many as are too easily satisfied with themselves, and make those bold and presumptuous who need to be taught diffidence and self-distrust. But the risk must sometimes be run : I must run it this morning if I am to be true to the promptings and suggestions of my text, though I will do my best to minimize it.

1. Understand, then, that for the present I am addressing myself solely to the diffident and self-distrustful, to those who cannot be sure that they have "believed

unto salvation," or that they are actuated by worthy motives in their daily endeavour to trust the promises and keep the commandments of God, or that they can render Him any service which He will accept ; to those who shrink from using any words which express a high religious tone and condition, which imply freedom from all base, earthly, and selfish inducements. In speaking to you, my brethren, I will, for the sake of my argument, accept your own account, your own estimate, of yourselves. I will assume that there *was* an intermixture of earthly with heavenly motives in the impulse which first led you to choose a religious life, in your earliest responses to the seeking and inviting love of God your Father ; that you did hope, by responding to it, to escape hell and win heaven, and that this was your main, if not only, motive in turning with and toward Him. I will assume that, even yet, you do not love Him purely for Himself, because of the great worth you see in Him ; and that, in serving Him, you are animated by the hope of receiving some wage, or reward, besides that of becoming pure and good, useful and kind. In your own eyes you stand condemned of poor, selfish, and even sordid motives, and hence there is as much fear as love in your very religion. And I do not defend you from yourselves, from your own censures and suspicions. Probably there is some ground, there may be much ground, for them. But the question I want to urge on

you is this: Granting that all you say of yourselves is true, still is there any reason why you should distrust the love of God, or doubt whether, by even such poor motives as you confess and deplore, He will yet draw and lift you into a large, free, and happy conformity with his will?

This parable of the Prodigal Son is, on all hands, admitted to contain the very essence of the Gospel, of the good news, the glad tidings, which Christ came to bring us. It has been called "the pearl of parables;" and you yourselves feel, I suppose, that no more simple, beautiful, and winning statement of God's dealing with sinful men can be found or desired. Well, then, what was the motive which, when all his substance was wasted, brought the Prodigal home? Was it very pure, and spiritual, and lofty? No doubt, he had a deep conviction of his own sinfulness and demerit. But so have you. And how had he reached that conviction? Simply by the pressure of want and misery, and because he could no longer get even the husks with which he would willingly have barked, rather than satisfied, his appetite. What does he himself assign as his motive for return? Simply the reflection that, while he was perishing of hunger, his father's hired servants had enough and to spare, and the desire to share their abundance. Because he was sure that his father would not let him starve, because he wanted to shake off the intolerable yoke of

want and misery, he arose and went to his father. On his own shewing, his motive was purely and frankly selfish—the desire to escape misery and to secure ease and plenty. And yet was there any lack of love and grace in his welcome home? Did not his father recognize him while he was a great way off, and run to meet him, and embrace him, nay, rise into a transport of love and joy when he once more held him in his arms? Did he not call for music and dancing, and command his entire household to make merry and be glad over the son who had been lost but was found, who had been dead but was now alive?

And what is your admiration of the Parable worth if it does not teach you that, however poor, imperfect, and selfish were the motives which first brought you to God, He will not pause to weigh and analyze them, and send you back until your heart has become as pure and perfect as his own? Where is your deference for Christ if, even from his lips, you will not learn that, because God is your Father, He is always glad to have you back, whatever the motives that lead you home; and that, if only you have a deep sense of your need of Him and of your unworthiness to receive anything at his hands, He will gladly supply all your needs, and outrun your highest hopes—not only admitting you to his house, but lavishing love and welcome upon you, and rejoicing over you with an unspeakable joy?

If you suffer your sense of sin and unworthiness, and the insufficiency of your motives, to make you doubt your welcome, and to distrust his love, how can you more gravely offend against his love? how can you more deeply sin against the spirit and intention of the Parable which portrays your Father as breaking in upon the Prodigal's confession of sin, not suffering him to complete it, but interrupting it with the command, "Bring forth the best robe, bring it *quickly*, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, . . . and let us eat and make merry"? Is not this fond and eager love which stops your mouth even when you open it to confess your sins, which so cordially rejoices over you as a son that for very shame you cannot say, "Make me one of thy hired servants," a sufficient answer to all your scruples and doubts and fears? Can you, with this Parable in your mind, cherish any doubt, any fear, lest God should reject and disdain you because you find a taint of selfishness in the motives which brought you to Him, and were thinking rather of how you should escape want and misery, evade hell and win heaven, than of the beauty of holiness, and the blessedness of being of one mind, and one heart, and one will, with the Fountain of all truth and goodness?

2. But, again, the Parable meets another fear which is apt to rise in the hearts of the diffident and self-distrustful. There are those who seldom look back to the

time when they first turned to God, and seldom doubt, when they do look back, that they did then yield to the influence of his Spirit and respond sincerely to the invitations of his love and grace. *Their* fear is that all the promise and beauty of those early days have passed away. And there may be some here who, in their hours of self-examination, say within themselves: "Ah, if only I could have kept the glow of my first faith and devotion, if I had become what I then hoped to be, all would be well. But I have lost it. The world has been too much with me. The cares of life, the toils of labour, cravings for ease and pleasure too often gratified, the staling of custom, the monotony and weariness of ever-repeated acts of duty and worship, have dulled my faith and chilled the ardour of my devotion and love. My religion has become mainly formal. I go on with it because it has become a habit with me, or because I am ashamed to turn back. I may be still in my Father's house, but I am seldom conscious of any quick and warm response to his love. Doubts have weakened me. Truths have grown familiar to me, and no longer exert their old power. Prayer has lost its savour and its hopefulness. I cannot trust that Providence will shape my ends for me, but must roughhew them for myself as best I may. I cannot rely on the grace of God to make me what I would be, what I ought to be. The better life is losing its charm for me. I am fast falling out of

sympathy with my Father's will. And He—He does nothing for me, never gives me aught that would make me strong and merry again. If I still go about my duties, I discharge them in the spirit of a servant, rather than of a son."

If these words in any measure answer to and express your feeling about yourselves, my brethren, again I will not contradict you nor defend you from yourselves. I will assume that this terrible self-indictment is true, though I hope it is not so true as you think it. But, admitting it to be true to the full, still you have no reason to distrust your Father's love, or to doubt that He will win you wholly to Himself and make his service your delight.

The Elder Brother in our Parable is not an admirable or attractive character, but he may be of great use, of great comfort, to you. *He* had long been in his father's house. He had never openly crossed his father's will. He was serving him, busy with his duties "in the field," at the very moment when the Prodigal came back. But his service had been that of the hired servant, rather than that of a son, as you now suspect yours to have been. He had kept a devout eye on the estate, and was not very sorry, I am afraid, that he was to be his father's *sole* heir. He had looked for reward, and grudged that no kid had ever been given to him that he might make merry with his friends. He is quite out of sympathy with

his father, calls the returned Prodigal "*thy* son," not "*my* brother," rakes up all his old sins against him at the very hour in which his father had forgiven them all. He even resists his father's entreaties, at least for a time, and refuses to share his father's joy. Can you conceive a stronger illustration and proof of the dulling influence of a customary and formal obedience? Yet how does his father meet him? With an outburst of love and confidence and tenderness which has always seemed to me the most difficult, and the most admirable, stroke in the whole parable: "*Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine*"! And here we must hope that the cold hard heart melted, though we are not told that it did; for who, or what, could resist such a love as this? We *must* believe that it melted into an answering tenderness, although the father will not give up the poor sinner who had found his way home, but still insists, "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad" over him.

Does the moral need any pointing, any application? Do you not feel for yourselves that, however dull and hard your hearts may have grown, however formal and unworthy your service, however cold and unloving your spirit, God has nevertheless grace and love *for you*, a love and grace which will yet break down all that is cold and indifferent in you, and that He will meantime accept any duty, any poor service you can render Him? When once you hear these gracious words, and hear them as if

spoken personally to you, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine," you will learn at last to serve for love, and not for reward, from the heart and not only from habit, or a cold conviction of duty, or a selfish expectation of gain.

Let no man despair of himself, then. Let no man distrust the compassion or the love of God. However selfish or imperfect the motive that brings us to Him, He will not only welcome us, but will also make us worthy of his love at last. However selfish or imperfect the spirit which animates our service, whether in the house or in the field, He will not only accept our service for more than it is worth; He will also breathe the ardour of his love into our cold hearts until we share his spirit, and delight to do his will, and ask for no reward except that we may serve Him still.

XXX.

A PARABLE.

THE kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain man who had two sons. And the younger of them, instead of saying to his father, "*Give* me my portion, that I may go and spend it," took his fate into his own hands, and, carrying off with him what he had been forbidden to touch, took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his ill-gotten substance in riotous living. And when he had spent all, and began to be in want, his father, whose love had never changed or faltered for a moment, sent him all that he needed, with many tender entreaties to return. But he would not. Living on his father's bounty, he nevertheless spurned his father's love, and evil entreated the messengers who brought his gifts and invitations. Some he beat, and some he stoned, and some he slew.

Now the elder son remained ever in his father's house, and was daily his father's delight. But even in their happiest moments a shadow would fall on them as they remembered the son and brother who was lost to them.

At length they could bear it no longer. The same thought sprang up at the same instant in both their hearts, so truly were the twain one. The father said within himself, "I will send my son ; peradventure he will hear *him*." And the son said within himself, "I will go after him ; peradventure he will come back with me, and then my father's face will no longer be clouded with grief."

So the elder son left his father's house, where all that the father had was his, and in which he had daily made merry with many friends, to seek and to save him that was lost. With patient feet he trod the long difficult road, suffering many strange indignities at the hands of the citizens of that country, till at last he found his brother ; whom, when he saw, he ran forward to meet, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. With many pathetic words, and many cordial signs of love, he besought the prodigal to return, that he might be the stay and comfort of his father's heart. But the prodigal, though so poor, thought himself rich, though in a most miserable bondage, thought himself free, and hardened himself against all the beseeching memories of home which rose within him, and the appealing grace of his brother's lips. He renounced the father who had begotten him. He claimed as the fruit of his own toil the gifts of his father's bounty. He denied that his brother *was* his brother to his face. Nay, he conspired

with the citizens of that country, and the dark tyrant whom they served, against the brother who came to save him from their cruel hands. They mocked at him ; they buffeted and scourged him : they put him to a cruel and a shameful death.

That crime awoke his conscience. He was filled with remorse and despair ; and, but for the grace of Heaven, he would have laid violent hands on himself, and have gone " anywhere, anywhere, out of the world." But the brother, whom he had done to death, had a life he could not reach. He rose from a grave that could not hold him. He came back to the sullen desperate man who had found no place for repentance, though he had sought it carefully and with tears. He renewed, and multiplied, the signs and entreaties of love. And, at sight of him, at the touch of a love stronger than death, the hard heart melted. He rose from the ground on which he had cast himself, but only to fall at his brother's feet, and sob out broken confessions of his guilt, his unworthiness of a love so tender and so true. But his brother grasped him by the hand, raised him to his feet, carried him off to his inn, washed away the stains of his foul and abject condition, put a new clean robe upon him, and joyfully and tenderly led him home.

As they came and drew nigh to the house, their father, who was hungrily watching for them, saw them while yet they were a great way off, saw too that the task of love

was accomplished, and ran to meet them, and fell on the neck first of one and then of the other, and kissed them. And when the younger son, whom he had kissed first, would have fallen at his feet, and have once more confessed his sins, the happy father prevented him, and bade his servants bring forth the best robe and put it on him ; and commanded them to make ready a great feast ; for, said he, "*this*, my son was dead, and is alive again ; and *this* was lost, and is found." And they began to be merry ; and soon the whole spacious house throbbed to the dancers' feet, and to the sound of the music to which they danced.

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